

COMPARING ACADEMIC STAFF AND STUDENTS'  
PERCEPTIONS OF THE PURPOSE OF ASSESSMENT IN  
HIGHER EDUCATION

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this study is, firstly, to determine if there is a difference in the perceptions of academic staff members and students concerning the purpose of their actual assessment practices. Secondly, the aim of the study is to identify what the challenges are that may influence the implementation of effective assessment practices.

A case study design, involving the academic staff and students within the Baccalaureus Educationis (BEd) Early Childhood Development, Foundation Phase Programme in the Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, was used. The sample consisted of 30 academic staff members and 114 third-year students who each completed a standardised questionnaire (quantitative data), to get a broader idea of their perceptions and understanding of the purpose of assessment practices. The questionnaire was followed up by face to face interviews (qualitative data) with three staff members and three students in order to validate and supplement the quantitative data.

The method employed to analyse the collected data was a concurrent nested, mixed method design. The quantitative data analyses were done using SPSS computer software to determine the frequencies for both staff and students' perceptions. Statistical data analyses were also performed using a non-parametric chi-square technique. The collected qualitative data was first analysed using manifest and content data analysis. Codes had been developed after which the data was further analysed using SPSS computer software to determine the frequencies for both staff and students' perceptions.

The standards model which represents assessment reform (enquiry or outcomes-based assessment) and the measurement model (traditional assessment) were used as framework to interpret the collected data.

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The results of my study showed that both academic staff and students perceived the main purpose of assessment as developmental or formative. However, the stated importance of the formative purpose of assessment was not evident in the practice of academic staff. For example, academic staff reported that within their assessment practices, assessment either took place at the beginning of the module, sometimes during the module, but mostly at the end of the module. Furthermore, staff reported that within their assessment practices, self- and peer-assessment and feedback were infrequent occurrences and that feedback to students was almost never followed up with actions. Academic staff perceived the biggest challenge for effective assessment practice to be large class sizes, while students perceived the biggest challenge to be the reliability of assessment, including marking reliability and assessor reliability.

I concluded that the standards model of assessment is the desirable model in formal education and especially Higher Education, because it attempts to reflect what has been learned in criterion referenced terms. However, in this study, as well as in the Maclellan study (2001) and LOAP study (Fun, 2005), academic staff declared a commitment to formative purposes of assessment, but students perceived that staff engages in practices that were not in line with the standards model of assessment.

### **Key words:**

Assessment, curriculum reform, curriculum alignment, outcomes-based assessment, integrated assessment, assessment as enquiry, assessment purposes, assessment practice, standards model, measurement model.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	<b>ix</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	<b>x</b>
CHAPTER ONE .....	1
1 Introduction and orientation of the study .....	1
1.1 Background and rationale .....	1
1.2 Research question.....	3
1.3 Research aim .....	4
1.4 Research methodology .....	4
1.4.1 Research approach and design .....	4
1.4.2 Sampling and data collection .....	5
1.4.3 Data analysis .....	6
1.5 Limitations .....	6
1.6 Outline and organisation of this report.....	7
CHAPTER TWO .....	8
2 Educational reform in South Africa and the influence on assessment practices.....	8
2.1 Introduction .....	8
2.2 Background to traditional content-based education and assessment practices.....	8
2.3 Outcomes-based education (OBE).....	9
2.4 Learning programme .....	11
2.5 Assessment practice within an outcomes-based paradigm .....	14
2.6 Role of student and academic in the assessment process.....	16
2.6.1 The student.....	16
2.6.2 The academic staff member as assessor.....	18

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

2.7	The purposes of assessment .....	19
2.8	Relevant empirical studies .....	20
2.9	Models used to interpret the purpose of assessment practices .....	22
2.9.1	Measurement model.....	23
2.9.2	Standards model.....	24
2.10	Conclusion.....	26
CHAPTER THREE .....		28
3	Research design and methodology.....	28
3.1	Introduction .....	28
3.2	Research paradigm .....	28
3.3	Research design.....	29
3.4	Research methodology .....	31
3.4.1	Quantitative component .....	32
3.4.2	Qualitative component .....	32
3.5	Site selection and sampling.....	33
3.5.1	The site.....	33
3.5.2	Sampling .....	35
3.6	Data collection and procedures .....	36
3.6.1	Quantitative data collection .....	36
3.6.2	Qualitative data collection .....	38
3.7	Data analysis .....	39
3.7.1	Quantitative data analysis .....	39
3.7.2	Qualitative data analysis .....	40
3.8	Validity and reliability .....	41
3.8.1	Strategies used within the quantitative component.....	41
3.8.2	Strategies used within the qualitative component.....	42
3.9	Ethical considerations .....	43
3.10	Conclusion.....	43
CHAPTER FOUR.....		45
4	Data analyses and interpretation .....	45
4.1	Introduction .....	45

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

4.2	Data collection and analyses .....	46
4.2.1	Quantitative data .....	46
4.2.2	Qualitative data .....	48
4.3	Results and interpretation.....	50
4.4	Summary of results .....	66
4.5	Conclusion .....	68
CHAPTER 5 .....		69
5	Summary of the main findings, recommendations and implications.....	69
5.1	Summary of the report .....	69
5.2	Discussion of main findings.....	72
5.2.1	Academic staff perceptions of purpose and actual assessment practices ..	72
5.2.2	Students’ perceptions of assessment purpose and practice.....	75
5.3	Recommendations and conclusion.....	76
5.4	Conclusion and further research and development .....	81
REFERENCES .....		82
<b>APPENDIX A – ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE</b>		<b>88</b>
<b>APPENDIX B – STAFF QUESTIONNAIRE</b>		<b>89</b>
<b>APPENDIX C – STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE</b>		<b>95</b>
<b>APPENDIX D – CODES FOR CHALLENGES TO ASSESSMENT</b>		<b>101</b>
<b>APPENDIX E – FACULTY ASSESSMENT POLICY</b>		<b>102</b>
<b>APPENDIX F – UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA ASSESSMENT POLICY</b>		<b>117</b>
<b>APPENDIX G – LETTER OF CONSENT</b>		<b>122</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1: Compare content-based education and outcomes-based education	11
Table 2.2: Assessment paradigms	15
Table 4.1: Example of statistically no significant difference in perceptions	47
Table 4.2: Example of statistically no significant difference in perceptions	48
Table 4.3: Perceptions of general purposes of assessment	51
Table 4.4: Academic staff's ranking of the three most important purposes	53
Table 4.5: Students' ranking of the three most important purposes	54
Table 4.6: Academic staff and students' perceptions of assessment practices	58
Table 4.7: Difference between academic staff and students' perceptions	60
Table 4.8: Difference in perceptions of judge on face value	61
Table 4.9: Results of the challenges for academic staff	62
Table 4.10: Results of the challenges for students	64



## **LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 1.1: Purposes of assessment	19
Figure 5.1: Adapted Learning and Assessment Accountability Model	80

## CHAPTER ONE

### 1 Introduction and orientation of the study

#### 1.1 Background and rationale

Higher education worldwide has been challenged to respond to the demands placed on the sector by two late modern imperatives, globalisation and the massification of education. In South Africa in particular, massification of higher education has a moral dimension. According to Lockett and Sutherland (2000) the inherited higher education (HE) system of the apartheid era was fragmented and separated along racial and ethnic lines. The first imperative, massification, thus implies that the higher education sector needs to respond to the gross historical inequalities of the past, by making the higher education sector accessible to previously disadvantaged groups. This requires an education system to be more open, flexible, transparent and responsive to the needs of under-prepared, adult, lifelong and part-time students.

Globalisation, on the other hand, brought about continuous change in technology and skills formation which required high levels of transferable skills. Employers as stakeholders in the education system are now more concerned that graduates have the ability and skills to learn and become lifelong learners (Lockett & Sutherland, 2000). According to Troskie-de Bruin and Otto (2004) one of the aims of higher education is thus to prepare students for the world of work.

A major thrust in meeting the demands of these massification and globalisation imperatives was the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), legalised by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act Number 58 of 1995 (South Africa, 1995, p.1). The NQF is the facilitating mechanism or philosophical framework for achieving a coherent system of education and training and registering unit standards and qualifications (De Waal, 2001). A further development is the Higher Education Qualification Framework (HEQF), October

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2007. The framework serves as a basis for integrating all Higher Education (HE) qualifications into the NQF and its structures, for the purpose of standards generation and quality assurance.

In South Africa the NQF and the introduction of Outcomes-based Education and Training (OBET) necessitated a paradigm shift from content to competence in assessment practice in education, training and development. With OBET, assessment forms an integral part of the learning process and more questions are being raised about the role and effectiveness of assessment (Bushney, 2005; Falchikov, 2005). These changes in the education system pose enormous challenges for assessment practices. It requires academics to be aware of how Outcomes-based Assessment (OBA) influences their practice and the implied demands it has on them. According to Mahlangu (2004) it is important for academics to consider and manage their assessment by thinking about and responding to, *why* assess, before they implement any assessment strategy.

In 2000 I started working at the University of Pretoria as a lecturer and in 2002 was appointed as an education consultant. During this time it was my experience that although national and institutional assessment policies (see Addendum E) were developed, almost no change had been visible in classroom assessment practices. The old curriculum approach, characterised by heavy emphasis on content, memorisation, rote learning, test and examination is continuing even today. It is not that I'm against memorisation of content but I support the argument by Kramer (1999, cited in Mahlangu, 2004) that memorisation is an important element of learning but only when memorised knowledge can be recalled for a useful purpose, such as problem-solving, critical thinking, etcetera. I also observed that assessment was treated as a separate entity from teaching and learning and usually followed after course content. This led me to the focus of my study, which is to determine the perceptions as to why (purpose) academic staff assess their students.

My experience as an educational consultant at the university foregrounds two assumptions relating to assessment, which I bring with me into this study. My first assumption was that academic staff concentrated more on formal accountability

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purpose and grading of students, which I refer to as the measurement model, rather than on the purpose of improving students' learning, which I refer to as the standards model. My first assumption was highlighted by Harvey and Knight, 1996 (cited in Hinett & Knight, 1996, pg.3) who said that:

*... it sometimes seems as if assessment procedures are in place for the benefit of university management and not for the benefit of learners, and that learning can suffer if academics concentrate on formal accountability procedures, rather than helping students to learn.*

Boud (1990), and Sutherland and Peckham (1998) are all of the opinion that Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) resort to assessment for accreditation, while neglecting assessment for learning. According to Bushney (2005), the neglecting of assessment for improvement of learning leads to large numbers of ill-prepared students. Bushney also warns that Higher Education Institutions cannot continue with their conventional teaching and assessment practices, but need to deal with alternative assessment practices to address the rising numbers of ill-equipped students.

My second assumption was that academic staff (who designed the assessment) and students (who experienced the assessment), had different views on the purposes of their actual assessment practices. Academic staff perceived their assessment practice as being formative (standards model) orientated while students' experienced it more as measurement orientated.

These assumptions lead to the formulation of the following research question and sub-questions as a means to gather empirical evidence to either support or refute these claims.

### 1.2 Research question

*How do academic staff and students of one higher education programme perceive the purposes of their actual assessment practices?*

To address the above research question I formulated the following sub-questions:

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- How do academic staff and students rank the general purposes of assessment?
- How do the views of academic staff on the purpose of assessment relate to their practices?
- Is there a difference in staff and students' perceptions concerning the purpose of assessment within their actual assessment practices?
- What are the perceived challenges to effective assessment practices for both staff and students?

### 1.3 Research aim

The aim of my study is, firstly, to determine if there is a difference in perceptions of staff and students concerning the purpose of their assessment practices. Secondly, what the challenges are that may influence the implementation of effective assessment.

Luckett and Sutherland (2000) suggest that if purposes of assessment remain implicit and vague, there is danger that different purposes become confused and conflated, so that assessment as a consequence fails to play an educative role.

The information collected during my study is important as a guide for improvement of assessment practices accordingly and for further policy development within the Higher Education Institution(s).

### 1.4 Research methodology

#### 1.4.1 Research approach and design

The methodology employed in this study is as a concurrent nested, mixed method design (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). This implies that the study has a predominant method (quantitative) that guides the study.

I chose a qualitative approach to supplement the quantitative study because, according to Miles and Huberman (1994), qualitative data are useful when one needs to

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supplement, validate, explain, illuminate, or reinterpret quantitative data gathered from the same setting.

A case study was used involving the staff and students within the BEd Early Childhood, Foundation Phase Programme in the Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria. The context of the study is elaborated on in Chapter Three. The reason for selecting a case study was to get an in-depth insight into the research phenomenon.

Two other studies that impacted my study significantly were the study done by Maclellan (2001) in Scotland and the Learning Oriented Assessment Project (LOAP) carried out in Hong Kong (Fun, 2005). Maclellan (2001) worked with staff and students within the department of Educational Studies at the University of Strathclyde. The purpose of the study was to describe assessment practices as these were experienced by staff and students. The Learning Oriented Assessment Project (LOAP) 2005 was done in the form of a survey on Hong Kong academics and students (Fun, 2005). The survey involved all eight publicly funded tertiary institutions in Hong Kong and sought to determine academics' and students' perceptions of assessment purposes and practices.

I chose to draw on the same theoretical framework or models as Maclellan (2001) to discuss my research data. The models are elaborated on in Chapter Two. With permission of Prof. Fun of the LOAP (2005) project, I slightly adapted their survey questionnaire as my quantitative research instrument. These changes are further discussed in Chapter Three.

### **1.4.2 Sampling and data collection**

All the academic staff involved within the BEd Early Childhood, Foundation Phase Programme and all the third-year students were approached to complete a standardised questionnaire (quantitative data). The actual sample that I worked with was 30 academic staff members and 114 third-year students. The reason for using the third-years was that I assumed they had a more holistic view of the assessment practices after a few years.

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For the qualitative data a convenience sampling method was used to select respondents for semi-structured interviews. The reason for using the convenience sampling method or opportunity sampling, was that it provided easy access to participants, it didn't have to be representative of any group apart from itself, and my intention was not to generalise (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). For the purpose of my study only three staff members were interviewed and I selected them on the basis of their approaches to assessment. The student questionnaire included a question, asking for volunteers to be interviewed. Two Afrikaans-speaking students responded and I approached a third, English-speaking, student who came to me after the completion of the questionnaire, raising more concerns about their assessment practices. More detail on sampling and data collection are recorded in Chapter Three.

### **1.4.3 Data analysis**

A mixed method approach was used to analyse the collected data. According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) a mix of methods for analysing data yields more and different data to produce a more comprehensive description. This mix provides detail that is less likely if only one method is used. A mixed method data analysis allows the researcher to use the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques so as to understand the phenomena better by extracting more meaning from the data (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie in Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). The data analysis processes are elaborated on in Chapter Three.

## **1.5 Limitations**

The following limitations are applicable to my study. The first limitation is that during the data collection phase, the Faculty of Education started with initiatives (in the form of workshops) to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment within all undergraduate programmes, which included the BEd Early Childhood Foundation Phase Programme. The possibility exists that the workshop on assessment could have influenced staff perceptions of their assessment practices. The second limitation is my

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involvement with staff development within the specific Faculty. The programme that was used specifically for the case study may have caused bias, as I'm supporting academic staff to improve their assessment practices and have an idea of what is happening within their actual assessment practices. To deal with the potential bias I used a nested, mixed method approach with a qualitative method embedded in a quantitative method (standardised questionnaire), meaning that I could not manipulate the collected data and the qualitative data (interviews) was used to validate the quantitative data. A third limitation is that I can not generalise the results, due to the fact that my study focuses on perceptions within the BEd (ECD) Programme as a whole, and not on specific academic staff members and their specific students. The scope of the qualitative data was also too small which may be seen as not representative of the larger group.

### 1.6 Outline and organisation of this report

The report is divided into five chapters, each serving an individual purpose, but overlapping and intertwining nonetheless. Chapter One provides the background and rationale of the study. The research question, the aim, the research methodology and limitations to the study are captured in this chapter. In Chapter Two I discuss the broader concept of education, the reform thereof and assessment practices within an outcomes-based assessment philosophy. Views and research results of other researchers regarding the purpose of assessment are also considered. In Chapter Three a more detailed description of the research design and methodology are provided. Chapter Four gives a summary of the results and analyses applicable to the data obtained (questionnaires and semi-structured interviews) during fieldwork. Chapter Five provides a summary of the report, discussion of findings, implications and recommendations based on the analysis of the captured data.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

# **2 Educational reform in South Africa and the influence on assessment practices**

## **2.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I provide a theoretical framework by focussing on assessment practices as presented in the relevant literature, existing theories and models, as well as other empirical studies in this domain. The chapter first outlines the education reform in the South African context and the implications thereof for assessment practices. This includes: outcomes-based education, changes in the learning programme and assessment practices within an outcomes-based paradigm, the changing definition of assessment, the role of the student and the academic in the process and the purpose of assessment. Relevant empirical studies in this domain are then presented. Finally the models that were used to interpret the purpose of assessment practices are discussed.

## **2.2 Background to traditional content-based education and assessment practices**

Before I start with the educational reform and the acceptance of outcomes-based education, I need to give some background on the traditional assessment as it was practiced in the country before the reform in 1994.

Academic staff in the previous content-based education system usually preferred to achieve their teaching aims and objectives rather than being interested in what the student had to achieve or do. The aims were related to the subject in the form of a rigid and non-negotiable syllabus. Students were often taught without knowing what

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they should achieve (Mahlangu, 2004). Subject matter was the major issue in teaching. Academics often proved that their subject matter was effective through student assessment, where students could give back exactly what they had been given, with the purpose of evaluating the academic's teaching practice.

The assessment methodologies were usually content-based including behaviourist measurement in the form of formative and summative tests and examinations as the most commonly used measuring tools. The assessment often emphasised the regurgitation of knowledge and facts, particularly content, on lower cognitive level of Bloom's taxonomy of learning (De Jager, 2002). Students were graded according to the core academic curriculum (syllabus) and the result was a concentration of knowledge that did not necessarily include the skills and abilities of students to analyse, synthesise or evaluate a situation and propose a meaningful solution to an authentic problem (Norms and Standards for Teacher Education, Training and Development, 1997). Strong emphasis was placed on what the students knew rather than what they could do, which resulted in what Bushney (2005) refers to as ill-equipped students.

The above statements do not imply that the past education system did not deliver at all. What matters today is that good education and training has become one of the key aspects of the requirements for development in South Africa, as discussed under Section 1.1. In an attempt to achieve the latter, an outcomes-based education philosophy was adopted to drive the approach to teaching and learning in South Africa and to provide the framework for the new curriculum.

### **2.3 Outcomes-based education (OBE)**

In a world with a variety of philosophies on education and theories of learning, South African education, training and development has now been directed towards an outcomes-based philosophy to accommodate different imperatives including massification and globalisation, as discussed in Section 1.1. One of the most important aims of OBE is to lay the foundation for the development of a learning

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society (Department of Education, 1997b). Let us examine what the concept outcomes-based education entails, before discussing the difference between traditional content- and outcomes-based education.

Outcomes-based education is an approach to teaching and learning which stresses the need to be clear about what students are expected to achieve (Sieborger & Macintosh, 2001). Outcomes-based education can be described as an approach which requires academic staff and students to focus their attention on two things: **Desired end results (learning outcomes)** of each **learning process**. These desired end results are called the outcomes of learning and students need to demonstrate that they have attained them. They will therefore continually be assessed to ascertain whether they are making progress. It is an instructive and learning process that will guide the students to these end results. Academic staff are required to use the learning outcomes as a focus when they make instructional decisions and plan their learning opportunities (Van der Horst & McDonald, 1997).

The key concepts of outcomes-based education and learning are directed towards the **learning process** and focus on the **outcome(s)** which must be **clear to the student**. De Jager (2002) elaborates on these key concepts of outcomes-based education as follows: A clear set of learning outcomes around which all components, including assessment, can be focused. Transparency means it should always be clear to the students what they need to do and how they will be assessed.

How does outcomes-based education differ from the traditional content-based education? The following table tries to capture the difference between content-based education and outcomes-based education.

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**Table 2.1: Comparison of content-based education and outcomes-based education**

Education Dimensions	Content-based education	Outcomes-based education
Need analyses	Few stakeholders are consulted; not open to public The educator <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• develops the course for personal application</li> <li>• decides the needs</li> <li>• develops the needs with end product and transfer of information in mind</li> </ul>	Different stakeholders are consulted; employers, employees, government, special interest groups, providers and students The end product of needs analysis is reflected in unit standards Stakeholders develop needs on a student-driven scenario
Students	Rote learning Lectured Passive receivers	Critical thinking and reasoning Facilitated Active participants and in control of own learning
Educator	Teacher centred Main source of information	Learner centred Facilitate and guide
Presentation/teaching	The educator presents the learning material in a predetermined way The educator is in control of the learning event	The educator guides learners to achieve the outcomes The educator guides learners to construct own knowledge

*(Adapted from De Jager, 2002, pg. 65)*

Table 2.1 highlights the shift in education to focus more on the student and learning approach, rather than an emphasis on teaching. Students are required to be active participants in their learning while academics act as facilitators to guide them in constructing further knowledge. This shift to foregrounding the student and learning also influences the learning programme, which is now further elaborated on.

### 2.4 Learning programme

One of the major changes in outcomes-based learning, training and development is the process of assessment. Changing assessment changes the learning programme (Sieborger & Macintosh, 2001). A learning programme is a purposeful and structured set of learning experiences that leads to a qualification (Self-evaluation Report, University of Pretoria, 2007).

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Learning programme design in South Africa must take into account the philosophy of the required NQF, which is an outcomes-based learning system. Killen and Hattingh (2004) suggest that any learning programme should be evaluated according to the following outcomes-based education (OBE) principles, namely clarity of focus, designing back, high expectations and expanded learning opportunities.

**Clarity of focus** suggests that education and training systems should be organised so that academic staff and students can focus clearly, consistently, systematically and creatively on the important outcomes that students are to achieve. Important outcomes should require high quality, culminating demonstrations of significant learning in context. **Designing back** is inextricably linked to the first principle. It means working from the standard or outcome to plan sequences of learning. *“There should be direct and explicit links between planning, teaching and assessment decisions and the outcomes that students are to achieve”* (Killen & Hattingh, 2004, p.72). The third principle is that academics should have **high expectations of all students**; they should expect all students to achieve significant outcomes of high standards. The fourth principle is that academics must strive to **provide expanded learning opportunities** in recognition that all students do not learn in the same way and at the same time and pace.

When we consider the assessment implications embedded in these principles of OBE, it becomes clear that the starting point must be an explicit alignment between the outcomes for students to achieve and the methods academic staff use to assess and report that learning.

The way of assessing learning achievements is inextricably linked to the characteristics of curricula. The format, nature and scope of a curriculum have a direct impact on what will be achieved and assessed. If the curricula are content-based, the assessment will focus on mastering content (Killen & Hattingh, 2004). Outcomes-based assessment consists of a series of activities, which take place in order to obtain information and evidence about a learner’s competence in achieving outcomes (Olivier, 1998). According to Van der Horst and Mc Donald (1997) academics cannot get this realism in assessment if they do not know in advance exactly what it is that they want students to learn and why they want them to learn it. This is sometimes

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called curriculum alignment: what is taught must directly link with what is assessed and vice versa.

An important consequence of directing our attention towards the assessment of complex outcomes is that it changes the focus of assessment from quantity to quality. It changes the focus from asking: “*How many objective questions can the learner answer*” to “*How expertly can the learner integrate a range of skills into a complex performance*” (Killen & Hattingh, 2004, p.73). According to Killen (2003, p.10) “*quality perspective refers to understanding (rather than memorization), creativity (rather than compliance) and challenge (rather than blind acceptance)*”. This means that students must develop skills and competencies to ensure improved service delivery or job performance and be competitive in the global world.

Rauch (1992) suggests that in order for the students to effectively and professionally complete their work, they need to be well-informed, skilled and reflective or have the ability to assess and criticise their actions. The latter can be referred to as “applied competence”. The term “applied competence” is when “*knowledge, within the new education and training paradigm, is viewed as reflecting foundational, practical and reflexive competencies. This means that learners must be able to demonstrate understanding of the underlying theory, which is the basis of their practice in a particular context and, through reflection, must be able to integrate performance with understanding*” (SAQA, 2001, p.21).

In defining integrated assessment, which departs radically from traditional approaches to assessment, some descriptions of integrated assessment are presented:

“*Assessment should ensure that the candidate is a consistently competent individual, capable of undertaking the whole activity being assessed rather than small time consuming and trivial tasks*” (Scottish Qualifications Authority in Government Gazette, 2004, p.13 and SAQA, 2005).

The testing again and again of the same restricted range of skills and abilities can no longer be justified; instead of simply writing about performance, students should be required to perform in authentic or simulated real-world contexts. This demands innovative assessment approaches and methods, which ensure that all learning outcomes are in fact assessed, and that assessments add value to student learning

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(Council of Higher Education (CHE), Draft New Academic Policy for Programmes and Qualifications in Higher Education cited in Government Gazette, 2004).

According to SAQA (cited in Government Gazette, 2004, p.18), “assessment should never be an ‘add on’, to be used at the end of a learning programme in the form of a once-off written examination”. This does not suggest that written examinations cannot be used as a form of assessment, but an over-reliance on only one form of assessment, assessing only one mode of learning is no longer defensible. Sieborger and Macintosh (2001) and Van der Horst and MacDonald (1997) further emphasise the notion of assessment as a once-off happening and suggest that students need feedback and that they must be assisted to try again to improve their performance for competence.

Let us now look at assessment practice within an outcomes-based paradigm.

### **2.5 Assessment practice within an outcomes-based paradigm**

Rowntree, 2003 (in SAQA, 2005, p.11) reminds us that the importance of meaningful assessment in an education and training system remains that:

*“If we wish to discover the truth about an educational system, we must look into its assessment procedures. What student qualities and achievements are actively valued and rewarded by the system?”*

One way to understand OBA is to look at the paradigm shift from the traditional or content-based practice to an alternative or constructive assessment approach. Table 2.2 summarises the two paradigms or models as extreme poles on the assessment continuum.

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**Table 2.2: Assessment paradigms**

	<b>Traditional testing (measurement model)</b>	<b>Alternative assessment (standards model)</b>
Theoretical assumptions	Psychometric measurement, a scientific paradigm, measurable entity that develops in a predictable way, testing should be context-free and norm-referenced assessment	Assessment is based on human interaction and professional judgement based on evidence and contextually dependent; context should be built into assessment; criterion-referenced assessment
Purpose (why)	Summative – for grading, ranking, selection, prediction, etc.	Formative, diagnostic and summative – provision of feedback for teaching and learning
Focus (what)	A limited range of competencies that is easy to test, e.g. content knowledge, discrete facts and skills – the products of learning in familiar context	Continuous, internal and external, integral part of the teaching/learning process, opportunities for divergence, authentic, meaningful contexts, e.g. case studies, projects, portfolios, self- and peer-assessments
Response to learners	Does not necessarily take learner needs into account, minimal response, results quantified, usually a score; unhelpful for further learning	Respects learner needs, detailed, individualised and relevant feedback, helpful for further learning
Effects on learners	Disempowering, high levels of anxiety, encourages competition and surface or strategic approaches to learning, students learn to the test, emphasises a limited range of competencies, exams drive the curriculum, secrecy surrounds the assessment process	Empowering, active participants in the assessment process, encourages self-evaluation, metacognition, learner autonomy and deep approaches to learning; may encourage learner co-operation, emphasises higher order educational outcomes, and greater transparency in the assessment process

*(Luckett & Sutherland, 2000, p. 127-129)*

Table 2.2 highlights the move away from measurement and summative assessment as a single event to developmental and formative assessment as an ongoing process (Janse van Rensburg, 1998 cited in Bushney, 2005). The focus is on learning and not pure measurement of student performance which brings about a change in the definitions of assessment.



## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

Serafini (2000 cited in Falchikov, 2005) classifies assessment into different paradigms: assessment as measurement, assessment as procedure and assessment as enquiry. Serafini argues that differences between these paradigms are underpinned by the shift from a positivist to a constructivist perspective of knowledge.

For the scope of this study the discussion will only be on assessment as measurement, which, for me, refers to the measurement model used in my study, and assessment as enquiry or outcomes-based assessment, which refers to the standards model within my study. The use of the models as framework for discussion of data is elaborated on in Section 2.10. Traditional assessment as measurement is primarily associated with norm-referenced, standardised testing where objectivity and reliability take priority over academic and student involvement (Falchikov, 2005). Birenbaum (1996 cited in Falchikov, 2005) describes this approach to instruction and assessment in terms of the empty vessel conception of the student. This type of assessment was also discussed in Table 2.2 under traditional testing (measurement model).

Our modern understanding of assessment in an outcomes-based environment involves a number of conceptualisations, all of which to some degree involve students as active participants in the process (Falchikov, 2005).

It is important to highlight the roles of the student and academic staff in an outcomes-based environment.

## **2.6 Role of student and academic in the assessment process**

### **2.6.1 The student**

The student is the person who wants to submit evidence to be assessed to determine competence regarding the specific outcomes for a qualification. The student must have a clear indication of the outcomes, the conditions, the time and the criteria to determine competence (De Jager, 2002). The students become active participants involved in their own assessment (Mabaso, 2001 and Sieborger & Macintosh, 2001 cited in De Jager, 2002).

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

The student may do a self-assessment that should correlate with the assessment done by the assessor (Spady, 1994). Self-assessment stimulates metacognition, ownership and responsibility to contribute to the learning process (Van der Horst & McDonald, 1997). Students can also become involved in assessing each other (peer-assessment) by judging assessment products using pre-determined criteria (De Jager, 2002).

The question can however be asked: *Are students being consulted or involved in most of the assessment practices in Higher Education?* In most instances the answer will be *no* (McDowell & Sambell, 1999). According to McDowell and Sambell (1999) the following three difficulties may give rise to the exclusion of students from the assessment process:

*Student knowledge of assessment* – The first difficulty that may be considered is that students are not sufficiently knowledgeable or informed enough about assessment for their views to be taken into account in determining the purposes of assessment or how well these are achieved. They do not have pedagogical expertise in methods of assessment that would enable them to make sound judgements.

*Assessment purpose* – The second difficulty that may be considered is that some of the assessment purposes that students would identify are invalid and inappropriate. There is, however, some research that suggests that the latter view may not in fact provide a full picture of the ways in which students judge assessment. Nicholas and Smith (in McDowell & Sambell, 1999) undertook a questionnaire survey asking students and academic staff to indicate (from a list) those features which they thought might make a good assignment. The majority of academics thought students would choose easy tasks involving regurgitation; however, no students selected these items. The overwhelming student response was that a good assignment should be interesting, challenging and a good vehicle for learning. Students also selected a number of organisational features such as timing, clear instructions, fairness and consistency as important.

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

*Objectivity of assessment* – The third difficulty that may be considered is that students are in a special position with regard to assessment since it is they who are being evaluated. Taking into account their perspectives might reduce the perceived objectivity of assessment. For this reason, some views of assessment would deny the right of students to have their perspectives taken into consideration.

I tend to agree with McDowell and Sambell (1999) that the above views on the difficulties why students as stakeholders may not be consulted during the assessment process, may have held more sway in the past when assessment focused more on pure measurement. SAQA (2005) identifies a major shift from a “testing culture” (measurement) to an “assessment culture” (enquiry assessment).

The assessment culture affects the student role significantly:

*“...the perceived position of the student with regard to the assessment process changes from that of a passive, powerless, often oppressed subject who is mystified by the process, to an active participant who shares responsibility in the process, practices, self-evaluation, reflection, and collaboration, and conducts a continuous dialogue with the teacher”* (Birenbaum, 1996 cited in McDowell & Sambell, 1999, p.111).

### **2.6.2 The academic staff member as assessor**

The assessor is the person who must design the assessment according to the skills required for the qualification or study discipline, collect and evaluate reliable evidence and decide whether the student is competent or not (De Jager, 2002). In an enquiry assessment culture, learning should no longer be something that is done to the student, but something that the student is actively involved in (SAQA, 2000).

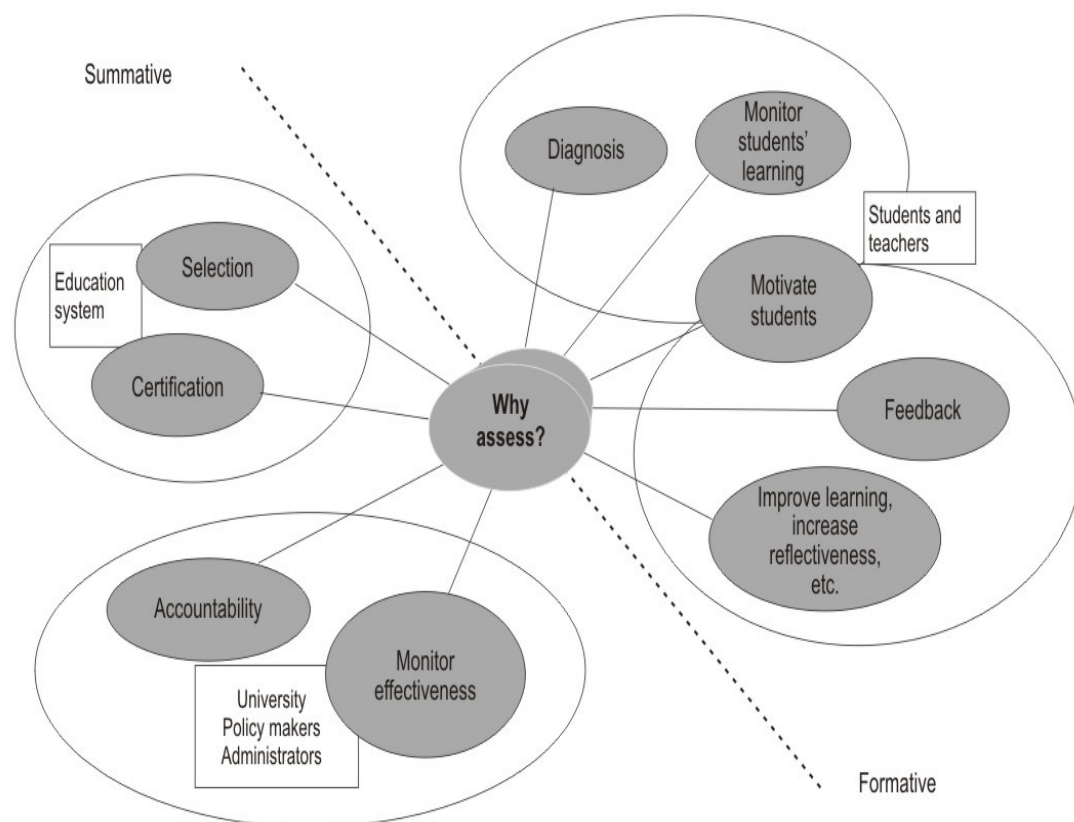
As such the role of the assessor has changed from being a gate-keeper who uses assessment to prevent students from developing further, to a supportive guide who has the success of the student at heart, so that the student can gain access to further learning (De Jager, 2002). Many students are perfectly capable of distinguishing between what assessment requires them to pay attention to and what results in worthwhile learning (Gipps, 1992).

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

Let us now further examine what the main purpose of assessment is in the enquiry paradigm.

### 2.7 The purposes of assessment

Falchikov (2005, p.5) developed a framework to interpret the general purposes of assessment as viewed by different role players.



*Figure 2.1 Purposes of assessment (Falchikov, 2005)*

As mentioned in Table 2.2 (under need analyses), different stakeholders are consulted in the assessment process; employers, employees, government, special interest groups, providers and students. Most role-players are likely to be interested in all the purposes of assessment but have different views on which are the most important (McDowell & Sambell, 1999). For example, academic staff and students may have different views on how an assessment system best helps students to learn. Academic institutions and

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

some employers on the other hand might have different opinions about what constitutes an acceptable level of student performance or what is the most valid and reliable way of certifying standards.

The purposes of assessment, in line with the changing focus of the emerging education and training system in South Africa, are increasingly understood as having the primary function of supporting learning (SAQA, 2005). This is also in agreement with international trends in education and training. Keeves (1994 cited in SAQA, 2005), describes the purposes of assessment as the basis for instructional decisions and includes the following purposes: placement decisions, formative decisions, and diagnostic decisions and summative or attainment decisions.

Mothata (2003 cited in SAQA, 2005), argues that the overall message emerging from the new approach to assessment is that assessment is now more about learning than testing: assessment must be for the benefit of the student and the academic rather than for accountability to outside bodies or programmes. It should never be an “add on” to be used at the end of a learning programme in the form of a once-off written examination. The reason being that a once-off written examination does not provide students and academics with opportunities to determine gaps in learning where remediation can be undertaken (SAQA, 2000). Other studies in this regard have already been undertaken both nationally and internationally, and these are overviewed in the section below.

### **2.8 Relevant empirical studies**

Maclellan (2001) carried out a survey to describe assessment practices as these were experienced by staff and students within the Department of Educational Studies at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, Scotland. In her study she concluded that for both staff and students the primary purpose of assessment was to grade or rank students. The importance placed on the developmental or formative (learning) purpose of assessment was not consistent with both staff and students. Staff reported that assessment neither took place at the beginning of a module nor could students be

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

assessed when they felt ready. Self- and peer-assessment were infrequent occurrences. The students on the other hand did not view assessment to improve their learning.

Another pertinent study is the Learning Oriented Assessment Project (LOAP) (Fun, 2005). This study was done in the form of a survey on Hong Kong academics' and students' perceptions of assessment practices. The survey involved all eight publicly funded tertiary institutions in Hong Kong. The results of this specific study will be further elaborated on during the discussion of my main findings in Chapter Five.

Samuelowicz and Bain (2002), in their study with twenty academics from five disciplines in Australian universities, used qualitative methods to ascertain what academic staff thought to be the purposes of assessment. Some emphasised assessment as a means of motivating students. Assessment ensured that students worked hard, covered the material in the syllabus and learned it. Others emphasised the importance of assessment in giving feedback on how well they were doing and areas where further help was needed. Others emphasised the main purpose of assessment as to give the students a grade which would summarise their performance for the benefit of future employers.

Samuelowicz and Bain (2002) suggest that the responses they received could be placed on a continuum. At one end of the spectrum, some lecturers perceived the purpose to be assessing students' ability to reproduce information; at the other end, the purpose was seen to be that of assessing the ability to integrate, transform and use information purposefully. They divide the academics' views into three main categories. The first view, the *reproduction of information presented in lectures and textbooks*. This is based on the belief that there is an established knowledge base which the academic provides and which students have to be able to reproduce. Actual reproduction means that the student has understood the material. The second view, the *reproduction of structured knowledge and application to modified solutions*. The student should be able to apply the knowledge to new but fairly standard situations. However, the understanding is essentially what has been provided by the lecturer. The last view, *students' ability to integrate, transform and use knowledge purposefully*. Students have to develop their own understanding by transforming and reorganising

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

established knowledge and procedure. The students' ability to use knowledge in open-ended, often ill-defined situations is assessed.

According to Newstead (2004) there may also be other reasons for assessing, for example, assessing students may be a tradition and the expectations from politicians, employers, parents, students and the general public are that students need to be assessed as part of their education. The existence of assessment also gives staff power over students, which might not otherwise exist.

Capturing the full educational benefits of well-designed assessment practices requires many of the conventional assumptions about assessment in higher education, namely that the main purpose of assessment is to rank or grade students, to be reconsidered. Luckert and Sutherland (2000, p.102) suggest:

*If purposes of assessment remain implicit and vague, there is danger that different purposes become confused and conflated, so that assessment as consequence fails to play an educative role.*

During the discussion and conclusion of my results I will consider the findings of the above empirical studies.

As stated in Chapter One I used the same models as Maclellan (2001) as a framework to interpret assessment practices within the scope of this study. This framework is now further discussed.

### **2.9 Models used to interpret the purpose of assessment practices**

Different models may be used to evaluate or interpret assessment practices. For the purpose of my study the practices deriving from the measurement and standards models were applied to interpret and discuss collected data. The reason for selecting these models was that they highlight the paradigm shift that is taking place in higher education in accordance with educational reform. The measurement model (Biggs,

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

2003) seeks to emphasise individual differences (measurement), which I view as the traditional testing. The standards model (Biggs, 2003) seeks to emphasise deep understanding, which can be demonstrated and it further promotes the development of the individual (learning), which I view as enquiry assessment or outcomes-based assessment. The assumptions underlying each model and their respective assessment practices according to Biggs (2003) are discussed.

### **2.9.1 Measurement model**

The measurement model is concerned with the relatively reliable performance of individuals in decontextualised, standardised tasks that are deemed to be valid indicators of the domain being assessed (MacLellen, 2001; Biggs, 2003). Cordon (2003) views the measurement model as norm-reference assessment (NRA), which is designed to assess characteristics of individuals for the purpose of comparing them with each other. The result is to rank order students and does not indicate how well they have learned something, just how they compare to other students. In this study the model is seen as the traditional testing (Table 2.1) of students.

#### ***Assumptions of the measurement model as it applies to education***

The model is based on a quantitative view of knowledge. In a quantitative framework, learning is evaluated according to how much correct material has been learned and can be demonstrated with the better students being those who know more. Teaching involves transmitting the main points, while assessment involves marking learners on their ability to report back accurately (traditional content-based assessment). This model projects individual performances as scores along a continuum so that individuals may be compared with each other (Norm-referenced assessment) (Biggs, 2003).

Tests are constructed in such a manner that the good performer can be distinguished from those that perform poorly. Measurement experts agree that a good attainment test yields a good spread that follows the bell curve. According to Biggs (2003) the ability of students is, however, not likely to be normally distributed, because students are not randomly selected. Ability is also not the only determinant of students' learning. Good teaching tends to override individual differences, producing a smaller



## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

spread of final results. Today it is still common practice to use the bell curve as a performance indicator.

Biggs (2003) argues that the only place where selective assessment is still of value in the university context is for entry into university. Once students have been selected, the aim of teaching and assessment should be to get students to learn what is in the curriculum.

### *Assessment practices deriving from the measurement model*

Firstly, *students are graded on the bell curve*. Many academic staff members and even students feel that it is fitting that a number of students should perform extremely well, while most of them should obtain average marks and only a few should perform poorly or fail (Biggs, 2003). This precludes assessment of criteria and aligned teaching. Secondly, *assessment is separated from teaching*. In the measurement model, assessment is a stand-alone activity, unrelated to teaching.

### **2.9.2 Standards model**

The standards model of assessment is the model designed especially for assessing learning in a teaching situation (Biggs, 2003). Unlike the measurement model, it is concerned with the level to which knowledge is embedded in deep understanding and can be demonstrated in authentic tasks. The standards model seeks to emphasise the value of education as a means of promoting the development of individuals (Maclellan, 2001; SAQA, 2005). Cordon (2003) views this model as criterion-referenced assessment designed to assess changes in performance as a result of learning, for the purpose of seeing what and how well something has been learned. Assessment, especially at university level, should be criterion-referenced based on predetermined standards from clear course goals and objectives (Cordon, 2003; Biggs, 2003 and SAQA, 2005).

### *Assumptions of the standards model as it applies to education*

One of the first assumptions made by the standards model is that standards can be set as course objectives. Qualitative assessment does not directly address the question of how much the students know, but how well they know it. The level becomes the grade

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

awarded (Biggs, 2003). Most students should be able to reach these standards at an acceptable level. The grading system is about what is acceptable. For the purpose of grading taxonomies, the Solo or Bloom (Biggs, 2003), for example, may be used. The standards model also assumes that different performances can reflect the same standards. Individuals learn and perform optimally in different conditions and with different formats of assessment.

A further assumption made by the standards model is that academic staff can judge performances against the criteria. This is critical. In order to make holistic judgements, academics need a theory of learning as it applies to their discipline. This means that they need to know what poor quality performance is, what good quality is and why they regard it as such (Biggs, 2003).

### *Assessment practices deriving from the standards model*

*Authentic assessment:* In the standards model the assessment tasks authentically represent the knowledge and skills to be learned. Verbal or written retelling is not often authentic. We need some sort of performance of understanding. The assessment task should at some point require an active demonstration of the knowledge in question (Biggs, 2003 and SAQA, 2005).

*Performance and decontextualised assessment:* The question of performance assessment raises the related question of whether the assessment tasks should be decontextualised or should they require students to perform the assessment in context. While both decontextualised and contextualised learning and assessment have a place, in practice decontextualised assessment has been greatly overemphasised, for example, term papers, written exams, etcetera (Biggs, 2003).

*Holistic and analytic assessment:* According to Biggs (2003) a valid or authentic assessment must be of the total performance, not just aspects of it. This does not mean that the assessment of components undertaken as formative assessment are not useful, but in the end assessment should address the whole of what the student needs to know

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

and is able to do. This type of assessment refers to integrated assessment as was suggested under learning programmes in Section 2.4.

*Judging performances against the criteria:* In order to assess learning outcomes holistically, it is necessary to have a conceptual framework that enables you to see the relationship between the different parts and the whole. Biggs (2003) suggests that academics need to develop their own framework. He suggests the use of taxonomies, for example the Solo taxonomy, as a useful framework.

*Convergent and divergent assessment:* According to Biggs (2003), convergent assessment involves solving problems that have a particular, unique answer. Convergent thinking is closed. Divergent assessment on the other hand deals with generating alternatives, where the notion of being correct gives way to other assessments. Divergent thinking is open (Biggs, 2003). Teaching and assessment should address both convergent and divergent processes.

*Unintended outcomes:* Assessment practices should allow for rich learning experiences. An academic should, for example, ask students to set up and answer a question on a topic that is not addressed in the paper. Other ways of assessing unintended outcomes are reflective journals, critical incidents and the portfolio of evidence (Biggs, 2003).

### 2.10 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview on the education reform that has taken place in the South African context since 1994. This reform includes outcomes-based education, changes in the learning programme and assessment practices within an outcomes-based paradigm, the changing definition of assessment, the role of the student and the staff member in the assessment process and the purposes of assessment. Furthermore, relevant empirical studies were highlighted and discussed. Finally, the models which captured the educational reform and were used to interpret data collected in this study, were also presented. Foregrounded in this chapter were the changing roles of the

## **University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)**

student and academic staff in the assessment process and the discussion of the models that were used to interpret the purpose of assessment practices as researched within this study.

In Chapter Three the research design and the methodology used in the study are presented and discussed.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **3 Research design and methodology**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Chapter Two provided a theoretical basis for the empirical component of this study. This chapter clarifies the research design and methods that guided and informed this study. It also elaborates on the research paradigm, site selection and sampling, the data collection and data analysis. Finally it addresses the validity and reliability and the ethical considerations of the study.

As mentioned in Chapter One, the research conducted for this study was that of a case study design to investigate the purpose of assessment practices within one programme at a Higher Education Institution. The purpose of the investigation was elucidated in the research question, which resulted in the design and implementation of a survey questionnaire and follow-up interviews. These instruments were implemented with both the academic staff and students. These instruments were used to inform the research question as presented in Chapter One. Literature relating to educational reform in South Africa and the influence on learning programmes and ultimately assessment practices was studied in order to establish a rationale for conducting this study and define the research design and methods.

#### **3.2 Research paradigm**

As educational research is a social science, the research design for this study seeks to address concepts of social reality. The research highlights the social reality that is the experience of individuals in the creation of the social world (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2002). The focus on the individual's perceptions/experiences within one

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

specific programme, locates this study within the interpretive paradigm. In the interpretive paradigm, meaning, understanding and interpretation are focal points of the research.

Sections 3.2 and 3.3 clarify the research paradigm and design respectively as focusing on academic staff and students within a single programme in order to investigate their understanding/perceptions of their social context. The result of this design paradigm is that the research would be regarded as non-interventionist as it does not impose an external form, but instead seeks to understand the case from within. The value for the interpretive researcher lies in the ability to conduct an in-depth analysis of individuals' experiences. The purpose of this study, therefore, is a means to better understanding of the phenomenon (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2002).

As mentioned in Chapter One, this study arose out of my experiences and observations of assessment practices where students' involvement in the assessment process is ignored, even with the acceptance of OBE as a philosophy, as was discussed in Chapter Two. A solution to understanding the actual assessment practices was to investigate both academic staff and students' perceptions of the purpose of assessment.

### **3.3 Research design**

The case study was implemented with the staff and students involved within the BEd, Early Childhood Development and Foundation Phase Programme.

The aim of the study was to determine if there was a difference in perceptions between the academic staff and students concerning the purpose of their assessment practices, as experienced within the above-mentioned programme. The study also aimed to determine what the challenges were, if any, that influenced effective assessment practices.

Merriam (1988) supports the definition of other authors that a case study is the examination of an instance in action. The context of this study provided a unique

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

example of real people in a real situation, enabling readers to understand the ideas more clearly than simply to present them with abstract theories or principles.

To consolidate the classification of this research as a case study, I will draw on the definition of a case study according to its special characteristics, as defined by Merriam (1988). The four characteristics she cites are: particularistic, descriptive, heuristic and inductive. These are dealt with separately to illuminate their scope within this particular study in order to substantiate its classification as a case study.

The *particularistic* characteristic means that a bounded system (case) can be identified as the focus of the study. The case can be in the form of a programme, an event, a person, a process, an institution or a social group (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). In this particular study, the bounded system was in the form of a group of people to find out how they perceive the assessment practices within a specific programme. The data yielded from this study focuses on the academic staff and students' perceptions of the purpose of actual assessment practices and what the challenges are that influence effective assessment.

The *descriptive* characteristic means that the study should result in a rich description of the phenomenon under study, includes as many variables as possible and portrays their interaction (Merriam, 1998). The description provided in this report begins in Section 3.5 of this chapter in which the context of the programme is established, followed by a description of the assessment practices within the specific programme. In Chapter Four the data collected is presented and discussed.

The *heuristic* characteristic, as defined by Merriam (1998), is appropriate in the sense that in this case it means that this study should illuminate the reader's understanding of the respondents' perceptions to the purpose of assessment as experienced within the specific programme. This is addressed in Chapter Four where the data is analysed and presented.

The final characteristic of the case study as defined by Merriam (1998) that should be evident in case studies, is that they ought to be, for the most part, *inductive*. This means that generalisations, concepts or hypotheses mostly emerge from an

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

examination of the data that is grounded in the context being examined. In the instance of this study, there was no working hypothesis; broad assumptions were made instead. Firstly, that academic staff concentrate more on the formal accountability purpose of assessment rather than on the purpose of improving students' learning. My second assumption was that academic staff (who design the assessment) and students (who experience the assessment), have different views about what the purposes of assessment might be. These assumptions were captured within the two models, measurement and standards models (see Chapter 2) that were used to interpret the data.

### 3.4 Research methodology

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000, p.183), it is becoming clear that case studies “frequently follow the interpretive tradition of research rather than the quantitative paradigm”. Yin (1994), on the other hand, warns that the case study strategy should not be confused with qualitative research. Case studies can be based on any mix of quantitative and qualitative evidence. Considering Yin's statement, I decided to conduct my study by using a mixed method design. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) classify six major mixed method designs, of which I selected the concurrent nested, mixed method design for my study. The nested design has a predominant method (quantitative or qualitative) that guides the study.

I chose the quantitative method as the dominant approach in this study with a qualitative method to supplement or be nested within the quantitative approach. My intentions for selecting the qualitative method to supplement the quantitative method was firstly, that according to Miles and Huberman (1994) qualitative data is useful when one needs to supplement, validate, explain, illuminate, or reinterpret quantitative data gathered from the same setting. My second intention for using the qualitative method to supplement the quantitative method was to gain a broader perspective as opposed to using the predominant, quantitative method alone.



## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

### 3.4.1 Quantitative component

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005) a quantitative approach involves either identifying the characteristics of an observed phenomenon or exploring possible correlation among two or more phenomena. According to Mouton (2001) the numeric data consists of statistics and numbers. Quantitative data reported on in this study was collected by means of a survey questionnaire that will be elaborated on in Section 3.6.

I used the following requirements of quantitative research, as stated in Goosen (1999, p.5), to guide the quantitative component of my study:

*Objectiveness:* The research procedures were clearly determined and questionnaires were structured so that the preferences of the researcher did not influence the research. In my study an adapted standardised questionnaire (LOAP questionnaire) was used.

*Generalisation:* The sample group was selected from a larger student population which consisted of a representative group (third-year students) that experienced assessment practices within the specific programme. Although the sample population was well spread and representative of students and academic staff, it was difficult to generalise, due to the fact that this study didn't use the assessment practices within different learning areas as a variable. The study only focused on the broad perceptions of academic staff and students concerning the purpose of their actual assessment practices within the specific programme as a whole.

*Repeatability:* I strived to conduct and report the research in a way that other researchers would reach similar outcomes when repeating the research method. This study was also based on other empirical studies as discussed in Section 1.4.1.

### 3.4.2 Qualitative component

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005) a qualitative approach has two features. The dominant feature of qualitative data is that a qualitative approach firstly focuses on phenomena that occur in natural settings and secondly, a qualitative approach involves studying those phenomena in all their complexities.

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

In this study the views on assessment of both the academic staff and students were obtained quantitatively, but in order to have a broader perspective, triangulate and supplement quantitative data, some academic staff members and students were interviewed. This process of collecting data through interviews is elaborated on in Section 3.6.

### 3.5 Site selection and sampling

I have already indicated in Chapter One that I am an education consultant at the Higher Education Institution where this study was conducted. The specific BEd programme was selected mainly due to my close involvement with the academic staff of the Early Childhood Development Department. Another reason for selecting this specific programme was that this specialised programme is coordinated from within one Department, while in most of the other BEd programmes the module coordinators are situated within a range of various departments. The distribution of module coordinators mostly within one department made the collecting of data more accessible and structured. More details regarding the programme and the assessment practices are provided in the section below.

#### 3.5.1 The site

The BEd Early Childhood Development and Foundation Phase Programme is a teacher training programme in the Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria. The duration of the training programme spans over a four-year period, full time. The programme is divided into 66 modules consisting of fundamental modules, core modules and electives. For the purpose of the study I will not elaborate on the different modules within the programme. The focus of my study was on the broad perceptions of the purpose of assessment practices within the programme and for that reason I am giving some background on the assessment practices within this specific Higher Education Institution, the Faculty of Education and lastly within the BEd Early Childhood and Foundation Phase Programme.

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

The assessment practices at the specific Higher Education Institution are guided by an institutional assessment policy which is based on international assessment principles (standards model) (see Appendix F). The policy recognises assessment as an *integrated and essential part of teaching and learning*. Each faculty, (in this case the Faculty of Education), is responsible for the development of an assessment policy, which in turn guides individual assessment practices within that particular faculty.

### ***Assessment practices within the Faculty of Education***

According to the Faculty of Education's assessment policy (see Appendix E) the following administrative guidelines are designed to ensure that assessment practices within the Faculty comply with the principles outlined within the institutional assessment policy:

- The assessment programme for each course/module should be designed to be consistent with the outcomes of the course.
- The links between each assessment task and the course outcomes should be made explicit to students.
- Assessment techniques and strategies must be appropriate to the type and level of learning described in the course/module outcomes.
- The intellectual effort required to complete assessment tasks should accurately reflect the outcomes of the course/module and the expectations of university students that are embodied in the level descriptors of the National Qualifications Framework. The level descriptors generally mean that assessment tasks should stimulate higher order thinking. It should challenge students to apply their knowledge, analyse unfamiliar information, and evaluate alternatives.

### ***Assessment within the BEd, ECD Programme***

It is assumed that all academic staff members at the Institution are familiar with the institutional and faculty assessment policies and procedures. Both Institution and Faculty assessment policies highlight the alignment of assessment to teaching and learning in order to improve student learning. According to Biggs (2003) it is believed that assessment can provide a powerful catalyst for learning when aligned

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

appropriately with the curriculum, outcomes and teaching-learning ethos of an institution.

Botha did research in 2004 on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment within BEd, ECD Programmes within different Higher Education Institutions in South Africa. She concluded that the assessment practice within this specific programme at the University of Pretoria is based on continuous assessment which included demonstrations, tests, as well as written examinations.

To get a better understanding and empirical evidence of the purpose of the actual assessment practices within this programme, I based the development of my qualitative research instrument mostly on the why (purpose) of assessment but also included the how of assessment (Falchikov, 2005; Makoni, 2000). The findings are discussed in Chapter Four.

### **3.5.2 Sampling**

According to Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2000) the quality of research not only stands by the appropriateness of methodology and instrumentation but also by the suitability of the sampling strategy adopted. Researchers also need to ensure not only that access is permitted, but is in fact practicable.

In this study accessibility to perform the study was given by the chairperson of the School of Teacher Training in which the specific BEd, ECD Programme is situated (see Appendix G). The practicability issue that was considered during the study was what the sample size would look like. After considering literature and discussing it with a statistician, the whole population were targeted to complete the questionnaire survey. This was done in order to get a holistic idea of staff and students' perceptions of the purpose of assessment and to enhance the reliability of statistical analysis of the data.

All the academic staff and third-year students involved within the BEd, ECD Programme were approached to complete the standardised questionnaire. The total

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

sample resulted in 30 academic staff members and 114 students. The reason for selecting the third-year group was because it was assumed that they would have a holistic view and better understanding of the assessment practices within the specific programme by their third year.

For the qualitative data a convenience sampling method was used to select respondents for semi-structured interviews. On the questionnaire a section was included asking participants if they were willing to be interviewed. Two Afrikaans speaking students responded but I approached a third English speaking student, who approached me after completion of the questionnaire. I approached three staff members who, I assumed, had different approaches to assessment, to be interviewed. The reason for using the convenience sampling method or opportunity sampling was that it provided easy access to participants and my intention was not to generalise (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2000). The reasons for selecting only six participants for the interviews were because of the limited scope of the study and generalisation not being the main objective.

### 3.6 Data collection and procedures

The following measurement instruments were used during the research to obtain information: a questionnaire survey and conducting of interviews with both academic staff and students.

#### 3.6.1 Quantitative data collection

##### *Motivation for the use of a questionnaire survey*

The survey questionnaire gave me a broader view of assessment practices within the specific programme. Participants could respond to the questions with the assurance that their responses would be anonymous. They could be honest, particularly when talking about sensitive or controversial issues, especially in this study which focused on the comparison between academic staff and students' perceptions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

As mentioned in Chapter One, the LOAP (Learning Orientated Assessment Project) questionnaire was used and slightly adapted to address my specific research questions. Since the aim of the questionnaire survey was to collect information on the perceptions of assessment purposes and the actual practices from both academic staff and students, the questionnaire had two parallel versions – one for academic staff, the other for students. The questionnaire consisted of three sections. As mentioned under section 1.4.1, I adapted the LOAP questionnaire slightly and for that reason I need to explain the use of the different sections within my study.

Part A of the LOAP questionnaire aimed to find out the extent to which academics and students *agree* or *disagree* with the general purposes of assessment. For my study I changed the scale from agree to “*very important*” and disagree to “*not important*”. I also added another question to Section A. I asked the respondents to rank the three most important purposes.

The reason for the changes was to determine if there was a difference in the level of importance of assessment purposes for academic staff and students. A four point Likert scale along a continuum of not important (1) to very important (4) was adopted, thus high scores denote very important and vice versa. Part A of the questionnaire was developed to address the first research question, namely, what are staff and students’ perceptions of the general purposes of assessment.

Part B of the questionnaire aimed to find out the frequency of learning-orientated assessment practices, as perceived by academic staff and students. A four-point frequency scale was used, without the option of “not sure” as was used in the LOAP questionnaire. I also added another question to Section B of the staff questionnaire: How do they go about assessing their students to achieve the purposes that they rank as important? The reason for the changes was that I wanted the participants to make a definite choice in order to get a broader idea of the link between their perceptions of the purpose of assessment and their actual practice. The second part of Section B was unchanged. Part B of the questionnaire was developed to address the second and third research questions:

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

- Is there a difference in staff and students' perceptions concerning the purpose of assessment within their actual assessment practices?

Part C of the LOAP questionnaire was unchanged and collected open-ended comments to address my fourth research question, which was on the challenges to “effective” assessment practices.

Although the LOAP questionnaire was a standardised questionnaire I decided to pilot the adapted questionnaire with two academic staff members and two students who were not participants within the study. The piloting was done primarily to discover what problems respondents might encounter during the process of responding to the items and whether the items were interpreted appropriately. Since time was limited, the validation/piloting session did not attempt to uncover why and how subjects responded. The only comment received was the technical layout of questions which I implemented within the final questionnaire (see Appendixes B and C).

### **3.6.2 Qualitative data collection**

The purpose of the interviews was to validate and supplement Section B of the questionnaire which dealt with the perceived experiences of the purpose of their actual assessment practices. The interviews were semi-structured, according to pillars of assessment practice on which assessment in higher education rest (Falchikov, 2005; Makoni, 2000). The pillars relevant to this study were: Why do you assess? and How do you assess? For the students the same questions were asked but they had to reflect on their perceived experiences of the assessment practices within the specific programme over the past three years. Although the interviews were guided by the above pillars, I followed up on the participants' answers I valued as being important.

According to Walford (1994), individual interviews should be conducted in a private setting with one person at a time. Individuals should feel free to express themselves truthfully. Academic staff members and especially students in this study might have

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

been uncomfortable if interviews were combined. To further ensure that students were not victimised or implicated in the study, they were interviewed individually.

### 3.7 Data analysis

The methodology employed in this study has already been identified as a concurrent nested, mixed method design. According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) a mix of methods for analysing data yields more and different data to produce a more comprehensive description. This mix provides detail that is less likely if only one method is used.

#### 3.7.1 Quantitative data analysis

Before I started with the data analysis, I had first done a data editing to identify and eliminate errors made by the respondent. I followed the steps as suggested by Moser and Kalton (cited in Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2000, p.265):

- *Completeness*: I checked that all questions were answered keeping in mind that Section C of the questionnaire was optional.
- *Accuracy*: As far as possible I checked that all questions were answered accurately, for example, if there was a tick in the necessary box.
- *Uniformity*: I did a check to determine if instructions and questions were interpreted uniformly.

No questionnaires were eliminated.

After data editing I first entered the participants' responses for each item on the questionnaire as a code into an Excel spreadsheet and afterwards into a statistical programme known as SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The open-ended question on the challenges for effective assessment was also quantified by developing a coding frame after the questionnaires had been completed. I took a random sample of the questionnaires and generated a frequency tally of the range of responses as a preliminary to coding classification, as suggested by Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2000). Having devised the coding frame, I made a further check on its



## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

validity by using it to code a further sample of the questionnaires. Each response was entered into the computer programme (SPSS) as a code (see Appendix D). The reason for quantifying the open-ended items within the questionnaire was to determine the frequency of perceptions concerning the challenges for effective assessment within the programme as a whole.

### 3.7.2 Qualitative data analysis

After I had collected data and recorded the interviews, I transcribed them verbatim into a word document. In some instances the participants responded in Afrikaans, and I transcribed in that language. For the sake of non-Afrikaans language users, I provided translations of the transcriptions and tried as far as possible to translate exactly as they had reported the data, in order not to interfere or pollute the data. I read the transcriptions several times and began the process of analysis (Creswell, 2002).

Data was thereafter coded to form categories which reduced it to small and manageable portions (Creswell, 2002). I started with the manifest content analysis method (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003) where I used predetermined categories to supplement and validate the quantitative data analyses (Section B of the questionnaire), focusing on the perceptions/experiences of the actual assessment practices.

After following the manifest content analysis method with predetermined categories (answers to the why and how) into themes or categories, I discovered that valuable data could get lost so I decided to take a second round working through the content. This time I used the latent content analysis where the themes emerge during the analysis itself and not predetermined as is the case with the manifest content analysis (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). This is in line with what is also known as inductive analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Creswell, 2002; Gay & Airasian, 2003) where the researcher constructs patterns that emerge from the data in order to make sense of them. I thus followed a multistage process of organising, categorising, synthesising, interpreting and reporting of the available data (Gay & Airasian, 2003).

### 3.8 Validity and reliability

Validity is an important key to effective research. If a piece of research is invalid, it is worthless (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2002). Validity is thus required for both quantitative and qualitative research.

As this is a mixed method study, the terms used to depict validity and reliability are not limited to these two terms, which are more commonly associated with quantitative data. When working with qualitative data, the terms trustworthiness, dependability, transferability and credibility are also used. To explain the validity and reliability of my study I will focus on the strategies used to improve the validity and reliability as suggested by Creswell (2007).

#### 3.8.1 Strategies used within the quantitative component

Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2002) define triangulation as the use of two or more methods of data collection. According to Denzin (2000) triangulation is the collecting of information from a diverse range of individuals and settings, using a variety of methods. This reduces the risk that the conclusion of your study will reflect only the systematic bias or limitations of a specific method, and it allows you to gain a better assessment of the validity.

Denzin (2000) distinguished between four types of triangulation, of which two have been applied in this study. These include data triangulation and methodological triangulation. *Data triangulation* involves the use of a variety of data sources in a study. These were present in the form of a standardised questionnaire that was used, which improved the reliability of the instrument. To improve the reliability further, I used a chi-square test to determine if there were any significant differences between the perceptions of academic staff and students. I also used individual interviews to validate the quantitative data and reviewed institution and faculty assessment policy documents. For *methodological triangulation*, multiple methods are used to study the

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

research problem. The process of methodological triangulation within this study has been explained throughout the previous sections within this chapter, where the mixed data collection and analysis procedures were outlined.

### 3.8.2 Strategies used within the qualitative component

Creswell (2007) acknowledges that there are many types of qualitative validation and that authors need to choose the types and terms in which they are comfortable and recommends that they reference their validation terms of strategies. Within my study I considered the term validation as an attempt to assess the “accuracy” of the findings as best described by the researcher and participants. Creswell (2007) suggests eight validation strategies of which I incorporated the following three strategies to document the “accuracy” of my study:

*Triangulation:* I used different sources and methods within my study. I used both quantitative and qualitative methods and a questionnaire and interviews as data collection sources.

*Clarifying possible bias:* At the beginning of the study I clarified my position as an education consultant, supporting the academic staff at the specific Higher Education Institution. I also stated or exposed my assumptions in Chapter One, which developed during my contact with different academic staff members and observing their practices. To accommodate for possible bias within the researcher role, I chose a standardised questionnaire, which I could not manipulate. I also chose to supplement or validate the data with the interview data.

*Member checking:* According to Creswell (2007) this is the most critical technique for establishing the credibility of a study. According to Stake (1995, cited in Creswell, 2007) participants should be asked to examine rough drafts of the researcher’s work, which I did. I contacted all six participants after which I sent each one a copy of their transcript of raw data to check. Most of them were only concerned about their use of grammar but accepted the transcript as is, except one academic staff member who made some grammatical changes which did not influence the data. The reason for

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

sending the participants the raw data was to solicit participants' views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations (Creswell, 2007).

### 3.9 Ethical considerations

Ethical standards that are set out by the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria were taken into account and applied during the study (see Appendix A). As mentioned in Chapter One, I work at the institution where the study took place. Consent to conduct the study at the institution was granted by the chairperson of the School of Teacher Training and the Ethical Committee at the Institution.

In the light of the design being that of a case study, I recognised what Stake (cited in Lumby, 2007) refers to as a “moral obligation” between the researcher and the respondents as they share personal views. For the purpose of the questionnaire they were informed that they were under no obligation to complete the questionnaire. I asked their signed consent to use the interpreted data. For the interviews it was made clear that participation was voluntary and that the respondent had the right to withdraw at any point in the study.

### 3.10 Conclusion

This chapter covered the research design and methods applied during the study. The research design as a case study was defended by developing the intention of the study as seeking to understand academic staff and students' perceptions within their context. Furthermore, the research paradigm was explored by locating their experiences/perceptions within an interpretive paradigm.

As a result of the research questions, quantitative and qualitative methods were used to explore and describe a particular case. The data collection and analysis processes were described. Lastly, the chapter presented issues relating to validity and reliability

## **University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)**

of the research. The chapter concluded with reference to the ethical considerations involved in the study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4 Data analyses and interpretation

#### 4.1 Introduction

The methodology employed in this study was a concurrent nested, mixed method design (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). This implies that the study had a predominant method (quantitative) in the form of a questionnaire that guided the study. I chose a qualitative approach (interviews) to supplement the quantitative study because, according to Miles and Huberman (1994), qualitative data are useful when one needs to supplement, validate, explain, illuminate, or reinterpret quantitative data gathered from the same setting.

The research undertaken as described in Chapter Three entailed a survey questionnaire and a semi-structured interview with academic staff members and students involved in the BEd (ECD) programme. The purpose of this study was to address the following research question: *How do academic staff and students of a higher education programme perceive the purpose of their actual assessment practices?*

To address the above research question I formulated the following sub-questions:

- How do academic staff and students perceive and rank the different purposes of assessment?
- How do the views of academic staff on the purpose of assessment relate to their practices?
- Is there a difference in academic staff and students' perceptions concerning the purpose of assessment within their actual assessment practices?
- What are the perceived challenges to effective assessment practices for both staff and students?

This chapter focuses on the data collection procedure and analyses, and presents the research results and interpretation thereof.

## 4.2 Data collection and analyses

### 4.2.1 Quantitative data

The *quantitative data* collection was in the form of a survey questionnaire which was completed by 30 academic staff members and 114 third-year students, representative of the different departments. Since the questionnaire aimed to collect perceptions of assessment purposes and actual practices for both academic staff members and students, the questionnaire had two parallel versions – one for academic staff members, the other for students.

The questionnaire (see Appendixes B and C) consisted of three parts: Part A - Assessment purposes, Part B - Perceived experiences of their actual assessment practices and Part C - Assessment challenges for effective assessment. The results for both academic staff members and students will thus be presented according to the three parts of the questionnaire.

The quantitative data analyses were done using SPSS computer software to determine the frequencies for both staff and students' perceptions. Statistical data analyses were also performed using a non-parametric chi-square technique. According to Pallant (2005) non-parametric techniques are useful when you have very small samples, which in this study were only 30 academic staff members and 114 students. I interpreted the outputs from the chi-square as suggested by Pallant (2005). The first interpretation that I did was to check whether I had not violated one of the assumptions of the chi-square concerning the minimum expected cell frequency, which should be five or greater (at least 80 percent of cells have expected frequencies of five or more). To determine the significant difference between academic staff and students' perceptions I used the Pearson significance level of 0.05. If the probability was smaller than or equal to the significance level 0.05, the difference between the groups was statistically significant (Cohen & Mannion, 2000).

Below are two examples. In the first example, Table 4.1, there was statistically no significant difference between academic staff and students' perceptions. In the second

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

example, Table 4.2, there was statistically a significant difference between academic staff and students' perceptions.

**Table 4.1: Example of statistically no significant difference in perceptions**

To identify students' misunderstanding/misconceptions of subject matter

		<b>Very important</b>	<b>Important</b>	<b>Less important</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Lecturer</b>	<b>Count</b>	18	7	5	30
	<b>% within po</b>	60,0%	23,3%	16,7%	100%
<b>Student</b>	<b>Count</b>	57	41	16	114
	<b>% within po</b>	50,0%	36,0%	14,0%	100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>Count</b>	75	48	21	144
	<b>% within po</b>	52,0%	33,3%	14,6%	100%
<b>Chi-Square Tests</b>					
		<b>Value</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</b>	
	<b>Pearson Chi-Square</b>	1.706(a)	2	0.426	
1 cell (16.7%) has an expected count less than 5					

The above item in the questionnaire met the criteria to perform the chi-square as only one cell had an expected count less than five and the significant value was 0.426. This value is bigger than the 0.05 which means that there is statistically no significant difference between the responses or perceptions of the academic staff members and the students. Reporting on this would read: "The difference between the academic staff and students' perceptions on assessment practices was not statistically significant on the  $p=0.05$  level".



## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

**Table 4.2: Example of statistically significant difference in perceptions**

The assessment was useful/ practical and students learned from it

		Very important	Important	Less important	Total
<b>Lecturer</b>	<b>Count</b>	12	17	1	30
	<b>% within po</b>	40,0%	56,7%	3,3%	100%
<b>Student</b>	<b>Count</b>	19	70	25	114
	<b>% within po</b>	16,7%	61,4%	21,9%	100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>Count</b>	31	87	26	144
	<b>% within po</b>	21,5%	60,4%	18,1%	100%
<b>Chi-Square Tests</b>					
		<b>Value</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</b>	
	<b>Pearson Chi-Square</b>	10.644(a)	2	.005	
0 (0%) cells have an expected count less than 5					

Again the above item in the questionnaire met the criteria, as no cells had an expected count less than five. The significant value in this case was 0.005. This is less than 0.05 which means that there is statistically a significant difference between the perceptions of the academic staff members and the students. Reporting on this would read: “The difference between the academic staff and students’ perceptions on assessment practices was statistically significant on the  $p=0.05$  level”.

### 4.2.2 Qualitative data

The *qualitative data* collection was in the form of follow-up interviews with three academic staff members and three students. The aim of the interviews was to get a more in-depth idea of the actual assessment practice. I used the following questions as suggested by Lockett and Sutherland (2002) and which Falchikov (2005) refers to as the pillars for assessment, to guide my semi-structured interview: Why do you assess? and How do you assess? These helped me to get an idea of the perceived purposes of their actual assessment practices taking place and to supplement and validate quantitative data.

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

Although I started off with the above questions to guide my interview(s), I prompted the participants to elaborate, especially when I was not sure of their answer(s) or when I found the answer(s) valuable.

I used both manifest and latent content data analyses (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003) to analyse the collected data.

### *Manifest Content Analysis*

According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003), this particular type of content analysis was defined by Berelson (1952) as “...a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (p.18). It is therefore associated mostly with quantitative techniques (often used on qualitative data) due to the use of standardised measurements that are applied to metrically defined units and used to characterise and compare documents (Manning & Cullum-Swan, 1994 as cited in Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Categories are therefore predetermined and coding procedures are standardised to the highest degree possible. In this study I used the manifest content analysis method to find answers to the questions of why and how academic staff members assess their students.

### *Latent Content Analysis*

Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) state that content analysis of a text “is determined by a subjective evaluation of the overall content of the narrative” (p.122). This means that the scheme for analysing the themes associated with the content emerged during the analysis itself and is not predetermined, as is the case with the manifest content analysis (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). This is in line with what is also known as inductive analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Creswell, 2003; Gay & Airasian, 2003). In my study I used the latent method to analyse the information that emerged during the interviews, which had not necessarily been noted using the manifest content analysis.

After the completion of the data collection and analyses of both quantitative and qualitative data I embarked on the process of presenting my results in the format that I thought most suitable. The results and the interpretation thereof follow below.

### **4.3 Results and interpretation**

The results from the dominant instrument, the questionnaire, are presented first, after which only selected results from the second instrument, the follow-up interviews, are used to validate or supplement the quantitative results.

Part A of the questionnaire consisted of two questions. For question A1 academic staff and students had to rate the general purposes of assessment according to the following scale: Very important (4), Important (3), Less important (2) and Not important (1). The fourteen purposes were given as in Table 4.2 and academic staff and students had to rate the purposes according to their own choice. Below are the perceptions of both academic staff and students. The results are presented in frequencies and percentages.

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

**Table 4.3: Perceptions of academic staff and students on the general purposes of assessment**

	Academic staff (n= 30)								Students(n= 114)							
	Very important		Important		Less important		Not important		Very important		Important		Less important		Not important	
	freq	%	freq	%	freq	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1.1 To identify what essential skills students have learned	20	66,7	10	33,3	0	0	0	0	76	66,7	38	33,3	0	0	0	0
1.2 To identify students' misunderstanding/ misconceptions of subject matter	18	60,0	7	23,3	5	16,7	0	0	57	50,0	41	36,0	16	14,0	0	0
1.3 To provide feedback to students about their learning	21	70,0	9	30	0	0	0	0	72	63,2	39	34,2	3	2,6	0	0
1.4 To measure students' learning/improvement over time	21	70,0	7	23,3	2	6,7	0	0	59	51,8	49	43,0	6	5,3	0	0
1.5 To motivate rote-learning	1	3,3	7	23,3	14	46,7	8	26,7	9	7,9	47	41,2	41	36,0	17	14,9
1.6 To encourage real-life or practical application of learning	22	73,3	6	20,0	1	3,3	1	3,3	76	66,7	31	27,2	7	6,1	0	0
1.7 To develop students' ability to assess themselves	15	50,0	13	43,3	2	6,7	0	0	45	39,5	53	46,5	16	14,0	0	0
1.8 To develop students' ability to assess their classmates	4	13,3	16	53,3	9	30,0	1	3,3	25	21,9	51	44,7	34	29,8	4	3,5
1.9 To develop students' ability to learn by themselves	21	70,0	9	30,0	0	0	0	0	59	52,2	44	38,9	9	8,0	1	0,9
1.10 To prepare students for professional life	21	70,0	9	30,0	0	0	0	0	85	74,6	25	21,9	4	3,5	0	0
1.11 To rank students in grades or marks	1	3,3	3	10,0	12	40,0	14	46,7	8	7,0	25	21,9	49	43,0	32	28,1
1.12 To motivate deep learning	21	70,0	8	26,7	0	0	1	3,3	51	44,7	53	46,5	8	7,0	2	1,8
1.13 To ensure students meet the required standards for a qualification	16	53,3	13	43,3	0	0	1	3,3	64	56,1	47	41,2	3	2,6	0	0
1.14 To monitor teaching performance	15	50,0	13	43,3	2	6,7	0	0	37	32,5	55	48,2	20	17,5	2	1,8

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

Only some items in Table 4.3 met the criteria, as explained under 4.1.2, to use the chi-square results. These were Items 1, 2, 4, 5, 7 and 11. The difference between the academics' and students' perceptions on these items were however found to be not statistically significant on the  $p=0,05$  level.

The rest of the items in Table 4.3 did not meet the criteria and cross tabulations were evaluated on face value. Items 3, 6, 8, 9, 10 and 13 seemed not to differ between academic staff and students. The items that might be questioned on face value are: To motivate deep learning (Item12) and To monitor teachers' teaching performance (Item 14). Out of the academic staff responses 70,0% (n=21) viewed Item 12 as 'Very important' while the students' perceptions were almost divided in that 44,7% (n= 51) of the students viewed it as 'Very important' and the other 46,5% (n=55) as 'Important'. Out of the academic staff responses 50,0% (n= 15) viewed evaluation of teaching performance (Item14) as 'Very important' while only 32,5% (n=37) of the students felt that it was 'Very important'.

The aim of the first question of Part A was to determine academic staff and students' perceptions of general purposes of assessment. For the second question of Part A in the questionnaire academic staff members and students had to select the three most important purposes from the table above and rank them in order of importance. The results of the ranking are used to address my first research question:

*How do academic staff and students perceive/rank the different purposes of assessment?*

Table 4.4 presents the ranking of the most important purposes as perceived by academic staff members and Table 4.5 presents the ranking of the most important purposes as perceived by students.

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

**Table 4.4: Academic staff’s ranking of the three most important purposes**

	Frequency	Percentage
<b>1</b> To identify what essential skills students have learned	4	13,3
<b>2</b> To identify students’ misunderstandings of a subject matter	1	3,3
<b>3</b> To provide feedback to students about their learning	1	3,3
<b>4</b> To measure students’ learning progress over time	2	6,7
<b>5</b> To motivate rote-learning	0	0
<b>6</b> To encourage real-life or practical application of learning	4	13,3
<b>7</b> To develop students’ ability to assess themselves	1	3,3
<b>8</b> To develop students’ ability to assess their classmates (Peer-assessment)	0	0
<b>9</b> To develop students’ ability to learn by themselves (Self-assessment)	2	6,7
<b>10</b> To prepare students for professional life	6	20,0
<b>11</b> To rank students according to grades or marks	0	0
<b>12</b> To motivate deep learning	6	20,0
<b>13</b> To ensure students meet the required standards for a qualification	3	10,0
<b>14</b> To monitor your teaching performance	0	0

According to the ranking by academic staff, the three most important purposes of assessment were firstly, To prepare students for professional life (Item 10) and To motivate deep learning (Item 12). This was followed by a need To identify what essential skills students have learned (Item1) and To encourage real-life/or practical application of learning (Item 6) and thirdly, To ensure students meet the required standards for a qualification (Item13).

It is important to highlight that none of the academic staff members ranked rote-learning, peer-assessment, grades or marks or to monitor teaching performance as important.

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

**Table 4.5: Students’ ranking of the three most important purposes**

	Frequency	Percent
<b>1</b> To identify what essential skills students have learned	18	15,8
<b>2</b> To identify students’ misunderstandings of a subject matter	9	7,9
<b>3</b> To provide feedback to students about their learning	7	6,1
<b>4</b> To measure students’ learning progress over time	6	5,3
<b>5</b> To motivate rote-learning	0	0
<b>6</b> To encourage real-life or practical application of learning	25	21,9
<b>7</b> To develop students’ ability to assess themselves	2	1,8
<b>8</b> To develop students’ ability to assess their classmates	0	0
<b>9</b> To develop students’ ability to learn by themselves	1	0,9
<b>10</b> To prepare students for professional life	30	26,3
<b>11</b> To rank students according to grades or marks	0	0
<b>12</b> To motivate deep learning	4	3,5
<b>13</b> To ensure students meet the required standards for a qualification	8	7,0
<b>14</b> To monitor your teaching performance	2	1,8

The ranking of the three most important purposes of assessment by students is almost a mirror image of the ranking by the academic staff members. Both academic staff and students rank To prepare students for professional life (Item10), To encourage real-life/or practical application of learning (Item 6) and To identify what essential skills students have learned (Item 1) as important. The only difference between the perceptions of academic staff and students are the perceptions concerning Motivation of deep learning (Item 12). Out of the students responses 3,5% (n= 4) ranked deep learning as important while 20,0% (n= 6) of the academic staff ranked it as important.

It is also important to again highlight the similarities between the academic staff and students. As with the academic staff, students also did not rate rote-learning, peer-assessment, grades or marks to be important.

Part B of the questionnaire was used to address my second and third research questions. For the first question of Part B academic staff members had to state how they assessed their students in order to achieve the purposes ranked as important. This was an open-ended question and for that reason I will first present the results from the

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

questionnaire. To validate and interpret their responses within the questionnaire, I also interviewed three academic staff members.

The results that follow will address my second research question:

*How do the views of academic staff on the purpose of assessment relate to their practices?*

The responses given to the first question of Part B, on how academic staff assess their students to achieve their stated purposes, were very general. The way in which the responses were given can be viewed as a weakness within my instrument (the questionnaire). I should rather have asked the participants to link their assessment practices to each of the three purposes which they ranked as important. Below are some examples of responses given without linking them to the specific purpose as ranked important:

*I include formative assessment opportunities informally by means of class discussions, case studies and formally by assignments.*

*The students write test and exams, mainly in the form of essays which they must prepare for in depth and independently. Formulating skills and interpretation are also assessed.*

*Implementation of theory- demonstrate their ability of applying content in discussions and assignments*

From the data I reached the conclusion that the perceptions of the purpose of assessment and academic staff's actual assessment practices can be placed on a continuum. At one end of the spectrum assessing students' ability to reproduce information (measurement model), for example, writing of tests and examinations, and at the other end assessing the ability to integrate, transform and use information purposefully (standards model), for example, discussions, case studies, etcetera.

To obtain more clarity on the relationship between academic staff's perceived purposes of assessment and their actual practices I conducted follow-up interviews



## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

with three academic staff members on why (purpose) and how (actual practice) they assess their students.

Similar results as within the questionnaire were found, namely that the relationship between perceived purposes of assessment and their actual practices can be placed on a continuum, from a measurement model approach for some academic staff members to a more standards model approach for others. For this reason I provide verbatim quotations from the interviews with academic staff:

*Assessment is mostly in the form of tests and a formal exam. Two tests but if the results are weak they get more than one opportunity, to improve the mark.*

*Continuous assessment is implemented for example: Theoretical knowledge in the form of Computer-based Testing (CBT) or end of year written exam.*

*To assess skills of students, the planning of actual lessons and development of a portfolio, group presentations and take home-exam (peer marking skills).*

*Compiling the portfolio is for me part of the hidden curriculum or the incidental learning that I want them to get because in teaching one of the important matters is having a very ordered and organised administration system and time management, so with the portfolio they are working towards deadlines.*

*Assessment is mostly based on case-studies and how students can incorporate theory into the case studies and see the relevance in their own teaching practice when they are professionals. We also have a class test, group assignments and interviewing plans and mini assignments or discussions in between case studies, we also have surprise quizzes to make sure students are reading.*

For the second question of part B of the questionnaire academic staff members and students had to rate their perceived experiences of their actual assessment practices over the past two years and draw on the totality of their perceptions/experiences when responding to the learning-oriented activities as stated in Table 4.6. The following scale was used: Always (4), Often (3), Sometimes (2) and Never (1). This section addresses my third research question:

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

*Is there a difference in academic staff and students' perceptions concerning the purpose of assessment within their actual assessment practices?*

Table 4.6 below presents the perceptions of both academic staff and students.

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

**Table 4.6: Academic staff and students' perceptions of their assessment practices**

Learning orientated assessment practices	Staff perceptions								Students' perceptions							
	Always		Often		Sometimes		Never		Always		Often		Sometimes		Never	
	freq	%	freq	%	freq	%	freq	%	freq	%	freq	%	freq	%	freq	%
B1 The assessment was useful/ practical and students learned from it	12	40,0	17	56,7	1	3,3	0	0	19	16,7	70	61,4	25	21,9	0	0
B2 I made clear to students what learning outcomes (e.g. critical thinking, etc.) were to be assessed	11	36,7	15	50,0	4	13,3	0	0	21	18,4	67	50,0	26	13,3	0	0
B3 I made clear to students what criteria(marking scheme) were used in assessment	3	10,0	2	6,7	18	60,0	7	23,3	4	3,5	25	21,9	61	53,5	24	21,1
B4 Students participated in deciding what criteria was to be used in the assessment	16	53,3	11	36,7	3	10,0	0	0	28	24,6	57	50,0	29	25,4	0	0
B5 More than one assessment activity (case study, essay, etc.) were used	21	70,0	7	23,3	2	6,7	0	0	18	15,8	68	59,6	28	24,6	0	0
B6 Students were assessed at the start of the modules/courses	1	3,3	5	16,7	12	40,0	12	40,0	1	0,9	11	9,6	66	57,9	36	31,6
B7 Students were assessed during the modules/courses (formative)	19	63,3	11	36,7	0	0	0	0	22	19,3	75	65,8	14	12,3	3	2,6
B8 Students were assessed at the end of the modules/courses	24	80,8	5	16,7	1	3,3	0	0	69	60,5	37	32,5	8	7,0	0	0
B9 Students were given advice on drafts/outlines before an assignment was submitted	17	56,7	7	23,3	5	16,7	1	3,3	31	27,2	59	51,8	24	21,1	0	0
B10 Students were given detailed feedback that justified the grade/mark given for their assignments	13	43,3	14	46,7	3	10,0	0	0	21	18,4	45	39,5	45	39,5	3	2,6

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

Learning orientated assessment practices	Staff perceptions								Students' perceptions							
	Always		Often		Sometimes		Never		Always		Often		Sometimes		Never	
	freq	%	freq	%	freq	%	freq	%	freq	%	freq	%	freq	%	freq	%
B11 Students were given detailed feedback that helped them improve their next assignments	12	40,0	13	43,3	5	16,7	0	0	9	7,9	46	40,4	56	49,1	3	2,6
B12 Students were given detailed feedback that helped them to better understand the subject/discipline	13	43,3	16	53,3	1	3,3	0	0	5	4,4	44	38,6	59	51,8	6	5,3
B13 Feedback was followed up by actions to improve student learning (e.g. tutorials, etc.)	2	6,7	17	56,7	10	33,3	1	3,3	4	3,5	34	29,8	54	47,4	22	19,3
B14 Students were given comments on their learning progress throughout the modules	14	46,7	14	46,7	2	6,7	0	0	18	15,8	68	59,6	28	24,6	0	0
B15 Double marking was used (moderation)	21	70,0	7	23,3	2	6,7	0	0	11	9,6	44	38,6	51	44,7	8	7,0
B16 Students also graded/ marked each other in the assessment activities (peer-assessment)	3	10,0	13	43,3	9	30,0	5	16,7	2	1,8	47	41,2	60	52,6	5	4,4
B17 Students also graded/ marked themselves in the assessment activities (self-assessment)	2	6,7	10	33,3	11	36,7	7	23,3	5	4,4	33	28,9	57	50,0	19	16,7

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

According to the SPSS output, Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 14, 15, 16 and 17 met the criteria to perform the chi-square. The rest of the Items, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13, did not meet the criteria for performing the chi-square technique and cross tabulations were evaluated on face value. The results and their interpretations follow.

According to the chi-square technique on the  $p=0,05$  level no statistically significant differences were found between the responses of academic staff members and students for Items 2, 3, 6, 8, 16, and 17.

Using the same technique, statistically significant differences were found between the responses of academic staff and students for Items 1, 4, 5, 14 and 15.

**Table 4.7: Significant difference between academic staff and students' perceptions**

Main impressions of my assessment practice for the past two years are:	Never (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often (%)	Always (%)	Participants
1. The assessment was useful/practical and students learned from it	0	3,3	56,7	<b>40,0</b>	AS
	0	21,9	61,4	<b>16,7</b>	S
4. Students participated in deciding what criteria was to be used in the assessment	0	10,0	<b>36,7</b>	53,3	AS
	0	25,4	<b>50,0</b>	24,6	S
5. More than one assessment activity (case study, essay, etc.) was used	0	6,7	23,3	<b>70,0</b>	AS
	0	24,6	<b>59,6</b>	15,8	S
14. Students were given comments on their learning progress throughout the modules/courses	0	6,7	<b>46,7</b>	<b>46,7</b>	AS
	0	<b>24,6</b>	<b>59,6</b>	15,8	S
15. Double marking was used (moderation)	0	6,7	23,3	<b>70,0</b>	AS
	7,0	<b>44,7</b>	38,6	9,6	S

AS: Academic Staff

S: Students

It is important to highlight the difference between the perceptions of academic staff and students on Items 4, 5 and 15. For Item 4, students participated in deciding what criteria are to be used in the assessment. Half of the students felt that they were involved in deciding on the criteria to be used, while fewer academic staff felt that students were involved. For Item 5 more than one assessment activity was used: 70%

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

(n= 21) of the academic staff felt that the practice was ‘Always’, while students’ perceptions were divided. Lastly it is important to highlight that for Item 15 moderation was used: 70% (n= 21) of academic staff felt that it was ‘Always’ while almost half of the students felt that it was ‘Sometimes’.

The rest of the items did not meet the criteria for performing the chi-square technique and cross tabulations were evaluated on face value. Items 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13 do seem to differ in terms of responses given by academic staff members and students.

**Table 4.8: Difference in perceptions judged on face value**

Main impressions of my assessment practice for the past two years are:	Never (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often (%)	Always (%)	
7. Students were assessed during the modules/courses	0	0	36,7	63,3	AS
	2,6	12,3	65,8	19,3	S
9. Students were given advice on drafts/outlines before an assignment was submitted	3,3	16,7	23,3	56,7	AS
	0	21,1	51,8	27,2	S
10. Students were given detailed feedback that justified the grade/mark given for their assignments	0	10,0	46,7	43,3	AS
	2,6	<b>39,5</b>	<b>39,5</b>	18,4	S
11. Students were given detailed feedback that helped them improve their next assignments	0	16,7	<b>43,3</b>	<b>40,0</b>	AS
	2,6	<b>49,1</b>	<b>40,4</b>	7,9	S
12. Students were given detailed feedback that helped them to better understand the subject/discipline	0	3,3	<b>53,3</b>	43,3	AS
	5,3	<b>51,8</b>	38,6	4,4	S
13. Feedback was followed up by actions to improve student learning (e.g. tutorials, etc.)	3,3	33,3	<b>56,7</b>	6,7	AS
	19,3	<b>47,4</b>	29,8	3,5	S

AS: Academic Staff

S: Students

It is important to highlight the differences on the issue of feedback. For academic staff the practice of giving feedback is perceived as taking place ‘Always’ and ‘Often’, while for students the actual practice takes place ‘Often’ and ‘Sometimes’. It also came out during the interviews with the students that they received a mark with no feedback justifying the mark. This is evident under Item 10.

For part C of the questionnaire academic staff members and students had to list at

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

least three challenges to effective assessment practices. This section of the questionnaire was used to address my fourth and final research question:

*What are the perceived challenges to effective assessment practice for both staff and students?*

The question on challenges to effective assessment practices in the questionnaire was analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The answers given by the participants were classified into themes after which a numerical code was applied to the different themes (see Appendix D). The numerical codes were then analysed using SPSS computer software for both academic staff and students to determine the frequencies and percentages. It is important to view the challenges of students separately from that of the staff members, as different themes developed from the text.

Table 4.9 gives the results of the challenges as experienced by academic staff and Table 4.10 gives the results of the challenges as experienced by students.

During the interpretation of captured data I will validate or supplement the challenges with comments from the participants made during the interviews to give an idea of the challenges within the actual assessment practices.

**Table 4.9: Results of the challenges for academic staff**

Challenges to effective assessment practices	Frequency	Percentage
1. Large class size	20	66,67
2. Negative student attitudes	7	23,33
3. Institutional constraints	0	0,00
4. High level assessment	4	13,33
5. Lack of skills from students	6	20,00
6. Lack of skills from lecturers	2	6,67
7. Module structure	3	10,00
8. Language issues	2	6,67
9. Lack of clear criteria and guidelines	1	3,33
10. Workload	4	13,33
11. Part time lecturers	1	3,33
12. No alignment between staff	2	6,67

The first category of challenges experienced by academic staff was **large class sizes**, which included comments such as: limited resources, lack of time and type of feedback given to students.

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

The second category of challenges, which was much lower than the first category that academic staff experienced, was the **negative attitude of students**. Comments that came out in the interviews were, for example: students don't care, not interested in formative feedback just want more marks, late handing in of assignments, following of instructions and low class attendance.

The third category of challenges that academic staff experienced, was the **lack of skills from students**, for example: formulation skills, to deal with criticism, critical thinking, reflection, independent studying, higher order thinking, low academic standards and deep reading. According to academic staff members all the challenges were worsened by large class sizes.

During the interviews with the academic staff members it was evident again that large class sizes were really perceived the biggest challenge for effective assessment practices. The following comments were made concerning the issue of large class sizes and their influence on effective assessment practices:

*Large classes influence the type of assessment especially the marking of essay type questions.*

*It does not influence what you assess but how you assess.*

*The reality of the matter is that if you teach a group of 500 having various lecturers teaching various students, it is not always easy to assess values.*

What also came out strongly during the interviews with the academic staff members, was the conflict that exists between what is expected from academic staff within the new approach to assessment, where students are actively involved in the assessment process and don't necessarily need a mark, and what the system/institution demands concerning student involvement and a mark/grading. To make this statement clear I give the comments from academic staff in verbatim:

*I tried group work and peer assessment in the past but got pressure from my department head to go back to the old method. I'm being paid to lecture and was accused that I come to class unprepared and don't do my work appropriately.*



## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

*The big thing that I found a huge tension between what the university is expecting, which is a percentage or symbols and OBA which is a degree/level of competence, which is outcome met or partially met. For example in the current system I now need to say how well was it done is it worth 50, 60%. A 73% means I don't give you a distinction than a more difficult decision crops up with the range between 75 and a 100% why is it 78 and not 80 to me that creates a lot of tension. I rather prefer to work with a scale of for example 1-6.*

*I have limited student participation, the ideal is to get students in at the beginning and end and have discussions, etcetera however:*

*In a university system having parents that are paying and having students old perceptions you need to teach so much, you have to be able to do this you have to be able to do that etcetera. It frustrates the students because they almost have a hybrid you know it is not totally here and not totally there it is somewhere in the middle*

Table 4.10 gives the results of the challenges as experienced by students. During the interpretation of captured data I will validate or supplement the challenges with comments from the interviews to give a broader idea of the challenges as experienced within the actual assessment practices.

**Table 4.10: Results of the challenges for students**

Challenges for effective assessment practices	Frequency	Percentage
1. Same deadlines	8	7,02
2. Too exam-oriented	10	8,77
3. Reliability of marking and grading	57	<b>50,00</b>
4. Assessor reliability	26	<b>22,81</b>
5. Inconsistency between modules	8	7,02
6. Relevancy of assessment	7	6,14
7. Feedback and follow-up	16	<b>14,04</b>
8. Language issues	4	3,51

The categories of challenges experienced by students are firstly, **reliability**, which includes reliability of marking and grading, for example, ineffective group work, unfair peer-assessment/markings, unclear assessment aims or criteria. Also reliability relating to **assessor reliability**, for example, lack of moderation, prejudice, difference

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

in standards, personal preference, inconsistency and norm referencing and finally the challenge of feedback or follow-up from academic staff.

It is important to supplement the above challenges stated in the questionnaire by some comments made by students during the interviews.

The first comment is on the issue of reliability:

*Students that laminate their assignments or use glitters received more marks. For me this is wrong, it is the content and practicality that needs to be assess and not how the assignment appears, as money doesn't make you a better teacher.*

On the issue of feedback students had the following to say:

*It is more educational if you receive feedback with a mark or percentage.*

*There is never comments for example if something counts 5 and you get 3 out of 5 there is no comments on how to improve, maybe if you go to the lecturer to find out more.*

Another challenge that came out strongly amongst all of the students that I interviewed was their experiences of peer-assessment. These comments also highlight for me the reason why peer-assessment was not viewed as important by both academic staff and students within the questionnaire. The students perceived the following as being challenges with peer-assessment:

*It is better if you receive criteria before peer assessment because you can allocate marks effectively*

*It is not as effective as when the lecturer assess. It is not easy to allocate marks to fellow students because you need to be in class with them again. Especially when it is between a pass and a fail*

*Although the guidelines/criteria were clear it was still a challenge when you have to assess open ended questions - as all the answers are not the same especially with the marking of the portfolios where you sat next to each other.*

*Make a decision between is it worth a 50 or 60 or is it a distinction or not. It is a skill that still needs to be developed. This was also a challenge that one of the academic staff had with the allocation of marks.*

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

*I don't think that the lady/student that I assessed the portfolio with was matured enough because she first looked at what did you give me and grade according to that.*

*I also feel it is unfair considering the amount of time and effort some people put in to be assessed by somebody that is not prepared to do it properly.*

### 4.4 Summary of results

As mentioned under Section 1.2 the first aim of the study was to determine if there was a difference in academic staff and students' perceptions of the purpose of their assessment practices. The second aim of the study was to determine what the challenges were for effective assessment practice.

According to the results there were no significant differences between the perceptions of academic staff and students concerning the following learning-orientated activities within their actual practices. Both academic staff and students agreed that learning outcomes and criteria to be assessed and used were made clear. They also agreed that assessment at the start of a module (diagnostic), peer- and self-assessment were rare but that assessment at the end of the module (summative assessment) was always used.

There was, however, significant differences in the results between academic staff and students' perceptions of the following learning-orientated activities (standards model) within their actual practices:

- The assessment was useful/practical and students learned from it.
- More than one assessment activity was used and students were given comments on their learning progress throughout the modules.

For academic staff it was mostly 'Always' and 'Often' while for students it was 'Sometimes' or 'Never'.

It is important to highlight that for the item that stated: "Double marking was used" most of the academic staff perceived it as 'Always' while most of the students felt

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

that it was not the case. What is also interesting, is that for the item that stated: “Students participated in deciding what criteria were to be used in the assessment”, half of the students perceived it as ‘Always’ while the academic staff felt that it was not the case.

Although the items on feedback did not meet the criteria for performing the chi-square technique, I cannot ignore the difference in perceptions on items that dealt with feedback, as it was perceived as one of the challenges for effective assessment by students. Academic staff members’ perceptions were divided between ‘Always’ and ‘Often’, while students perceptions were divided between ‘Often’ and ‘Sometimes’ on the following items relating to the feedback students received:

- Detailed feedback that justified the grade/mark given for their assignments;
- Detailed feedback that helped them improve their next assignments;
- Detailed feedback that helped them to better understand the subject/discipline;
- Feedback was followed up by actions to improve student learning.

The two items on feedback where the difference was most significant, was feedback that justified the grade/mark given for their assignments and feedback that was followed up by actions to improve student learning. I supplement or validate the above results on feedback again with comments made by students and academic staff during the interviews. The students had the following to say on feedback that justified the mark and actions to improve their learning:

*It is more educational if you receive feedback with a mark or percentage.*

*There is never a comment for example if something counts 5 and you get 3 out of 5 there is no comments on how to improve.*

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

Academic staff had the following to say on feedback:

*Large class size influence the type of assessment and feedback to students*

McInnis & Devlin (2002) agree that larger class sizes pose significant teaching challenges, not least in the assessment of student learning. Most troubling is that large classes may limit the amount of feedback provided to students. Although large class size is no excuse, it cannot be ignored as a challenge to giving constructive feedback to students.

Another challenge is the constant conflict between Outcomes-based Assessment (OBA) that highlights active student-involvement to determine their competency/performance, rather than a mark/grade and what the institution (system) wants.

For students the biggest challenges are the issue of reliability, which include marking and grading reliability and assessor reliability followed by peer- assessment, which they felt they were not comfortable with and feedback or follow-up by academic staff.

This was the summary of the main results and will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

### **4.5 Conclusion**

This chapter focused on the data collection and analyses as well as the presentation of the results. In the final chapter, Chapter Five, I will give an overview of the research study, the main findings and discussion, including the reference to other studies, implications of the study and lastly the recommendations and conclusion of the study.

## CHAPTER 5

### 5 Summary of the main findings, recommendations and implications of the study

The final chapter draws together the research question, the research process as well as the results, implications and recommendations that emerged from the study. A summary or overview of the report is presented in Section 5.1 followed by a discussion of the main findings in Section 5.2. The chapter concludes with the recommendations for policy and practice as well as for further research and development work.

#### 5.1 Summary of the report

Chapter One of the report provided the background to and rationale for my study. The Chapter started with a discussion of the two late modern imperatives of massification and globalisation that led to educational reform in Higher Education. I narrowed it down to the observations I had made of assessment practices during my work as an education consultant. During that time it had been my experience that although national and institutional assessment policies were being developed, almost no change had been visible in classroom assessment practices I observed at the institution where I worked. I also observed that assessment was treated as a separate entity from teaching and learning and usually followed after course content. This led me to the focus of my study, which was to determine the perceptions as to why (purpose) academic staff assess their students and how students perceive these assessment practices.

My experience as an educational consultant at the university fore grounded two assumptions relating to assessment, which I brought with me into this study. My first assumption was that academic staff concentrated more on formal accountability

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

purpose and grading of students, which I refer to as the measurement model, rather than on the purpose of improving students' learning, which I refer to as the standards model.

My second assumption was that academic staff (who designed the assessment) and students (who experienced the assessment), had different views on the purposes of their actual assessment practices. Academic staff perceived their assessment practices as being formative (standards model) orientated, while students experienced them as more measurement orientated.

These assumptions led to the formulation of the following research question and sub-questions as a means to gather empirical evidence to either support or refute these claims:

How do academic staff and students of a higher education programme perceive the purpose of their actual assessment practices?

The following sub-questions were used to supplement and guide the research question:

- How do academic staff and students perceive and rank the different purposes of assessment?
- How do the views of academic staff on the purpose of assessment relate to their practices?
- Is there a difference in academic staff and students' perceptions concerning the purpose of assessment within their actual assessment practices?
- What are the perceived challenges to effective assessment practice for both staff and students?

Chapter Two provided a literature review, starting off with the educational reform in South Africa and how it influenced learning programmes and ultimately assessment practices. The chapter also discussed the measurement and standards models which I used to interpret my results.

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

For the purpose of my study the practices deriving from the measurement and standards models were applied to interpret and discuss collected data. The reason for selecting these models was that the models highlight the paradigm shift that is taking place in higher education in accordance with the educational reform. Cordon (2003) views the measurement model as norm-referenced assessment (NRA), which is designed to assess characteristics of individuals for the purpose of comparing them with each other. The result is to rank order students and does not indicate how well they have learned something, just how they compare to other students. In this study the model is seen as the traditional testing (Table 2.1) of students.

According to Cordon (2003) the standards model is criterion-referenced assessment, designed to assess changes in performance as a result of learning, for the purpose of seeing what and how well something has been learned. Assessment, especially at university level should be mainly criterion-referenced, based on predetermined standards from clear course goals and objectives (Cordon, 2003; Biggs, 2003 and SAQA, 2005). This does not mean that a mark is totally ignored, but it must not be the main purpose of the assessment. In this study the model is seen as enquiry assessment or outcomes-based assessment (Table 2.1) of students. I will refer to these specific models during the discussion of my main findings later in this chapter.

Chapter Three discussed the research design and methodology. The research design was a case study which involved 30 academic staff members and 114 third-year students from the BEd (ECD) Foundation Phase Programme at the Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria. The research methodology was a concurrent mixed method approach. The qualitative method (interviews) was used to validate or supplement the dominant quantitative method (survey questionnaire).

Chapter Four presented the results and interpretations, followed by a summary of the main findings applicable to the data obtained (survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews) during fieldwork. Chapter Five, the final chapter includes a summary or overview of the report and a discussion of main findings. The chapter concludes with the recommendations for policy and practice as well as for further research and development work.



## 5.2 Discussion of main findings

In discussing assessment purpose and practices as perceived by academic staff and students, there will be an attempt to deduce the respective views and challenges of the two groups in such a manner that it addresses my research question(s) and assumptions made at the start of the study.

### 5.2.1 Academic staff perceptions of purpose and actual assessment practices

The results of my study showed that both academic staff and students perceived the main purpose of assessment as developmental or formative. However, the stated importance of the formative purpose of assessment is not evident in the practice of academic staff. For example, academic staff reported that within their assessment practices assessment either took place at the beginning of the module, sometimes during the module, but mostly at the end of the module. Furthermore, staff reported that within their assessment practices, self- and peer-assessment and feedback were infrequent occurrences and that feedback to students was almost never followed up with actions (see Table 4.6).

Similar results were found within the two studies on which the present study is based: Maclellan (2001) and the LOAP study, (Fun, 2005). The results in both studies were that academic staff and students perceived the purpose of assessment as formative, but in practice the importance which was placed on the formative purpose was also not consistent, as discussed via examples of non-formative assessment practices in the above paragraph. According to Maclellan (2001) there are at least three important educational implications arising from the following non-formative examples of assessment practices. Firstly, the practice of not assessing at the start of a module precludes the opportunity to modify teaching in response to student understanding (Prosser & Trigwell cited in Maclellan, 2001). Secondly, the practice of not assessing during the module, denies students the opportunity to determine the time and effort

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

needed to achieve desired learning outcomes. Thirdly, to discount students' judgment via self- and peer-assessment, is to fail to appreciate that effective learning is in large measure a function of strategic metacognitive behaviour (Biggs cited in Maclellan, 2001).

I want to add another educational implication: If feedback is not followed up with action, it does not contribute to the enhancement of learning. According to Carless (2003), a key element in learning-orientated assessment (standards model) is feedback, when students determine where they are now, where they are trying to go, and how they can get there. Feedback is formative only if it leads to actions by students and/or academic staff, which improve learning (Black, 1993). Most important, if the feedback is not acted upon, it is formative in purpose but not in function (Black & William, 1998).

Despite academic staffs' formative views on assessment purposes, all of the above-mentioned assessment practices which discount student learning, are inconsistent with the standards model of assessment (Fun, 2005). After the LOAP study Fun (2005, suggests that the connection between academic staff views and their practices is at best tenuous, if not entirely absent. For that reason the tentative link between views and practice is not surprising, since views/beliefs tend to be context dependent or situational.

The lack of consistency between views and practices could also be influenced by broader structural context. For instance, academic staff in this study suggest that their assessment practices are influenced or limited by perceived challenges/constraints such as large class sizes, negative attitudes, lack of skills of students and what the institutional system wants (bureaucratic control), for example, the system wants academic staff to teach or assess in a certain way or encourage them to distribute marks according to a "bell curve". These challenges may impede the transmission of views to practices, or create tension between the ideal and actual practice (Fun, 2005). Below are some comments made by academic staff in the present study concerning the challenges that large class sizes and bureaucratic control have on their actual assessment practices:

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

*Large classes influence the type of assessment especially the marking of essay type question and large class size does not influence what you assess but how you assess.*

*The big thing that I found a huge tension between what the university system is expecting, which is a percentage or symbols and OBA which is a degree/level of competence. For example in the current system I now need to say how well was it done is it worth 50, 60%. A 73% means I don't give you a distinction than a more difficult decision crops up with the range between 75 and a 100% why is it 78 and not 80 to me that creates a lot of tension. I rather prefer to work with a scale of for example 1-6.*

It is not that the purpose of grading or a mark is not used within a standards model of assessment, but it must not be the main purpose of the assessment practice. According to Bushney (2005), the neglecting of assessment for improvement of learning leads to large numbers of ill-prepared students.

In summary, the findings of this study mirror that of the Maclellan study (2001) and LOAP study (Fun, 2005). Although academic staff hold formative views of the purpose of assessment, the following three assessment practices (pre-module assessment, feedback follow-up by action, self- and peer-assessment), were reported as rarely used by most of the academic staff.

From the results it is also important to highlight that I cannot generalise on the link between the perceptions of academic staff on the purpose of assessment and their actual practices, but need to place the actual practices on a continuum as discussed under Section 4.2.2. At one end of the spectrum, for some academic staff the purpose of assessment is assessing students' ability to reproduce information (measurement model) and at the other end, assessing the ability to integrate, transform and use information purposefully (standards model). Samuelowicz and Bain (2002), in their discussion on academics' orientations to assessment practices, came to the same conclusion that orientations to assessment practices can be placed on a continuum.

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

Considering the above discussion, the findings partially support my first assumption that although academic staff perceive the formative purpose (standards model) of assessment as important, in practice they concentrate more on the formal accountability purpose (measurement model). The reason for saying partially is that I need to consider the reference Fun (2005) makes to the tentative link between views and actual practice. Views tend to be context dependent or situational and for that reason I can't ignore, for example, the challenge that large class sizes have on the purpose of the actual assessment practices that academic staff implement.

### **5.2.2 Students' perceptions of assessment purpose and practice**

This section examines the perceptions of students concerning their experiences of the same assessment practices as discussed in the last section. According to the main findings, students' perceived experiences of the purpose of the assessment practices were that the assessment had not developed their learning, which deviated from the standards model of assessment. For instance, they perceived assessment activities as follows: assessment had never been done at the start or during the module but mostly at the end of the module. Furthermore, students reported that self- and peer-assessment were perceived as infrequent occurrences. The perceived experiences of the students were similar to the perceptions of the academic staff concerning their assessment practices.

Although some academic staff members attempted to implement peer-assessment in the form of peer-marking, the students perceived the process of peer-assessment as a challenge for effective assessment practice.

According to Phillip, Wheeler, Langan and Dunleavy (2005) the success of peer-assessment depends greatly on how the process is set up and managed. Greater understanding is needed about the effects of inexperienced markers on assessment and about the involvement of students in the development of marking criteria and how it affects the final mark. On the other hand, Papinczak, Young and Groves (2007) implemented the development of student-involved criteria, but students' perceptions of peer-assessment experience remained quite negative. They suggested that maybe

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

students needed years of practice in peer-assessment in order to become comfortable with the process.

The differences in perceptions between academic staff and students concerning the purpose of their assessment practices are most prominent in the frequent use of practical/useful assessment, more than one assessment activity, double-marking of assessment (moderation) and student feedback which accompanied the mark given and feedback which is followed up with actions to improve. Academic staff perceived the use of the above-mentioned assessment activities (practice) as always/often while students' perceived experiences were that these activities were seldom/never used (see discussion under Section 4.3).

For students the categories that were perceived as posing the biggest challenges for effective assessment were reliability and lack of feedback that explains the mark given and no feedback from academic staff which is followed up by action. I agree with McInnis and Devlin (2002) that the communication of clear assessment criteria to students will address the reliability and feedback issue as experienced by students.

According to the findings, both academic staff and students perceive the purpose of assessment as being formative, but when it comes to the actual assessment practice, academic staff perceive their assessment practice also as being formative, while students perceive the practices as not being as formative in nature, but more summative, as discussed via examples earlier in this section. For that reason the findings support my second assumption, that academic staff and students have different perceptions of the purpose of their actual assessment practice.

### 5.3 Recommendations and conclusion

The final section of the report presents recommendations that could be considered for policy and practice, particularly in relation to assessment practices, also keeping in mind the perceptions of the challenges that academic staff experience, which may

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

influence the full realisation of assessment practices based on a standards model of assessment.

Before making any recommendations concerning policy it is important to mention that both the institution and the faculty where this specific study was done have new and revised assessment policies that align with the national assessment policies in South Africa. My concern, as mentioned in Chapter One, is that although policies exist, they are not necessarily being implemented yet within individual classroom assessment practices at Higher Education Institutions. According to McInnis and Devlin (2002) it is not simply about redrafting policy statements and regulations. The values underlying approaches to assessment are so deeply embedded in academic practices developed over years that it is extremely difficult to change them without challenging fundamental and often competing assumptions about the nature of teaching and learning across the institution. For this reason I start with the following recommendation:

My first recommendation on a short term level is that mechanisms or processes need to be established to assist with the marketing, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the new policy on institution, faculty, department and ultimately individual assessment practices.

The influence of large class sizes on the implementation of effective assessment practices (standards model), as was evident from the main findings, cannot be ignored and needs to be addressed. Considering the principles on which the Institution and ultimately the Faculty assessment policy is based (see Appendixes E and F), the standards model needs to be implemented within assessment practices, and for that reason I secondly recommend that intense research is done on how to implement a standards model approach within large class sizes.

For my third and final recommendation, which is on a long term level, I recommend the consideration of approaching change to assessment practices at an institutional level. Only then will the intended assessment reform, as discussed in Chapter Two,

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

start to happen and the issue of the influence of large class sizes on effective assessment be addressed.

According to McInnis and Devlin (2002) it is important to keep in mind that change at institutional level requires a planned approach that is in line with the mission and goals of the institution. I thus recommend that this Faculty of Education, which was used as the case within my study, follows the same process that was successfully implemented by the Faculty of Business at Queensland University of Technology (McInnis & Devlin 2002). Their institutional shift had been driven by immersion in issues to do with the improvement of the assessment of student learning. There were four principal phases in their process:

- A review of the assessment policies and practices in the Faculty
- The adoption of a Learning and Assessment Accountability Model
- The placement of a higher education assessment consultant in the Faculty
- A funded teaching and learning development project

The reason for recommending the phases of the above case study is that the Faculty of Education does have mechanisms or some of the above phases in place to support the improvement of assessment practices, but these are not linked to a planned approach or model for assessment. As yet, there is also no funded teaching and learning development project running that supports the academic staff in making the required changes.

During the fieldwork for my study some institutional changes did take place. The management model of the Institution changed, which gave Faculties more autonomy to determine strategies or mechanisms on how to improve their teaching and learning practices over a period of time. For that reason, I suggest that the Faculty of Education considers the implementation of the Learning and Assessment Accountability Model that was implemented by the Faculty of Business at Queensland University of Technology and links it to a funded teaching and learning development project to improve teaching, learning and assessment.

## **University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)**

Below is an adapted version of the Learning and Assessment Accountability model I propose. The strength of the model is that it takes a top down and bottom up approach to change, which I think will be more acceptable for academic staff, than a model that is strictly top down and which does not always consider challenges, for example large classes when it comes to implementation of the model. Another reason for suggesting this model is because of my experience in staff development initiatives. Individual academic staff members always complain about resistance from students and sometimes management if they attempt to change or adapt their assessment practices. If an institution, a faculty or a department follows a structured approach to change, as was done by the Queensland University of Technology, I'm confident that assessment practices can be reformed if needed.



University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

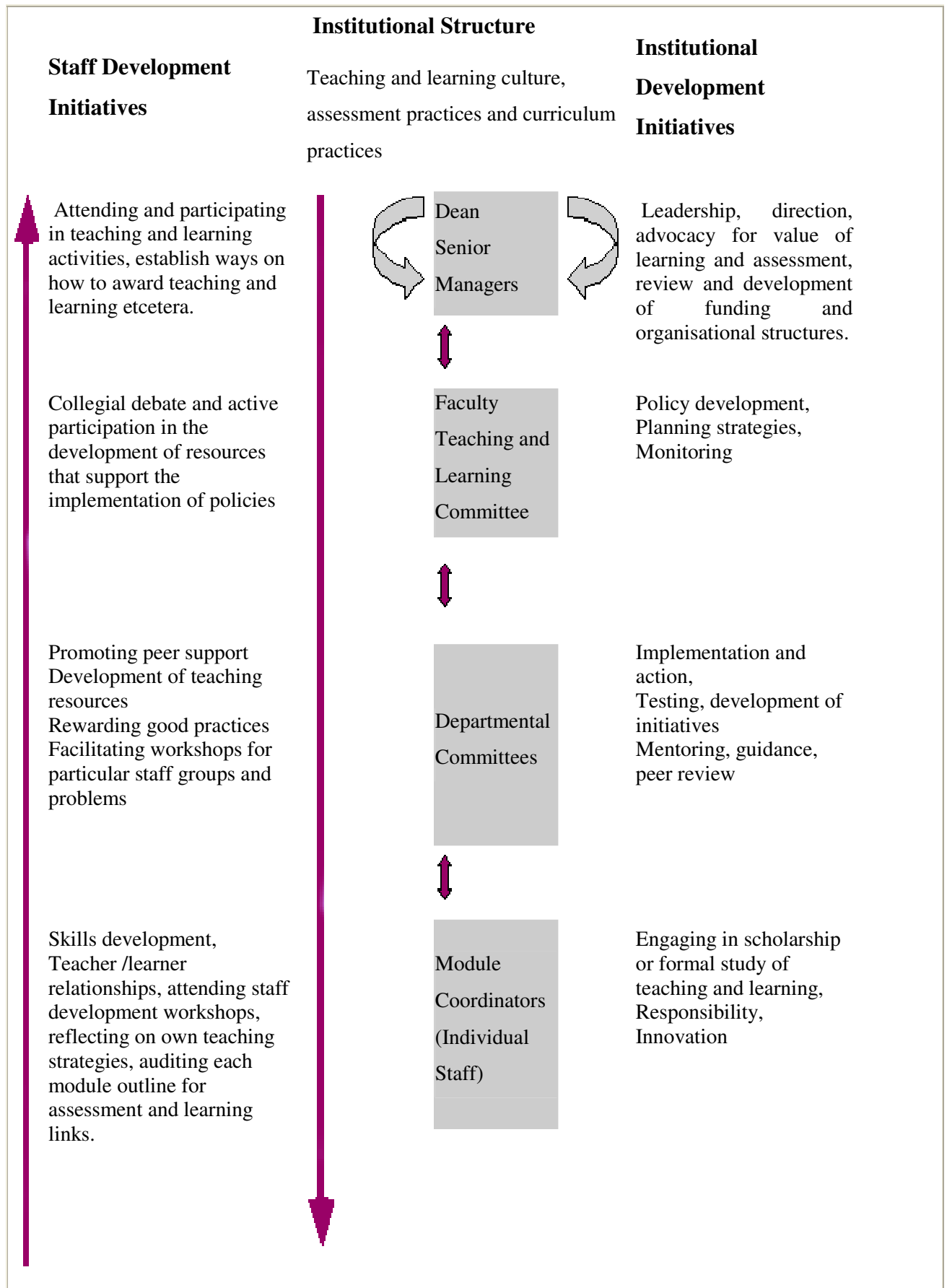


Fig. 5.1: Adapted Learning and Assessment Accountability Model (CSHE, 2000, pg. 3)

## 5.4 Conclusion and further research and development

In conclusion, the standards model of assessment is the desirable model in formal education and especially Higher Education, because it attempts to reflect what has been learned in criterion referenced terms (Biggs, 2003). However, in this study, as well as in the Maclellan study (2001) and LOAP study (Fun, 2005), academic staff declared a commitment to formative purposes of assessment but were perceived by students as engaging in practices that are not in line with the standards model of assessment as discussed under Section 5.1.

The main commonalities amongst the findings of the present study and that of the LOAP study (Fun, 2005) were:

- feedback follow-up by action that leads to improvement.
- the issue of large classes which influence actual assessment practices
- influence of what the system wants/bureaucratic control on assessment practices
- the rare use of self- and peer-assessment

Considering the commonalities in both our studies it can be useful to commission independent local research on aspects of assessment practices that require rethinking. From the findings of my study I suggest in-depth research into the following aspects of assessment practices with large class size as the main focus:

- Use of a standards model approach of assessment within large class sizes
- The effective use of self- and peer-assessment, within large classes
- Use of feedback to improve student learning
- Influence of bureaucratic control or institutional systems on assessment reform.

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## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

### Appendix A - CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

ANNEXURE D



UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
FACULTY OF EDUCATION  
RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

**CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE**

**CLEARANCE NUMBER : CS06/09/06**

**DEGREE AND PROJECT**

MEd  
Perceptions of assessment practices in one HE Department of  
the Faculty of Education

**INVESTIGATOR(S)**

Carol Gossmann

**DEPARTMENT**

Curriculum Studies

**DATE CONSIDERED**

09 October 2006

**DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE**

APPROVED

*This ethical clearance is valid for 2 years from the date of consideration and may be renewed upon application*

**CHAIRPERSON OF ETHICS  
COMMITTEE**

Dr Salomé Human-Vogel

Handwritten signature of Dr Salomé Human-Vogel.

**DATE**

09 October 2006

**CC**

Ms HE Barnes  
Prof W J Fraser  
Mrs Jeannie Beukes

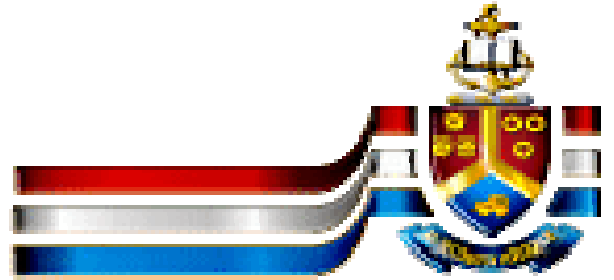
This ethical clearance certificate is issued subject to the following conditions:

1. A signed personal declaration of responsibility
2. If the research question changes significantly so as to alter the nature of the study, a new application for ethical clearance must be submitted
3. It remains the students' responsibility to ensure that all the necessary forms for informed consent are kept for future queries.

Please quote the clearance number in all enquiries.

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

### Appendix B Staff Questionnaire



University of Pretoria

Tel: (012) 420 5176

Fax: (012) 420 3828

E-mail: [carol.gossmann@up.ac.za](mailto:carol.gossmann@up.ac.za)

**Faculty of Education**

August 2006

**Dear Colleague**

The aim of this survey questionnaire is to determine the perceptions of staff and students concerning the main purpose(s) of assessment as implemented within the BEd Early Childhood Programme.

The questionnaire forms part of the data collection for my personal research in fulfilment of the MEd in Evaluation and Assessment qualification.

Your input will be highly appreciated!

Thank you very much.

Carol Gossmann

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

### CONSENT FORM

Please sign below if you agree to take part in this questionnaire survey.

I understand that all data will be treated anonymously and only summarised data will be published.

I understand that if I do not give my consent, I will suffer no discrimination or criticism, and my study grades will not be affected in any way.

Signed..... Date.....

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

### Staff Questionnaire: Perceptions of assessment practices/experiences

#### Meaning of Assessment

“Assessment” or “assessment activities” refer(s) to formal and informal activities/assignments such as questions, projects, essays and presentations, including written examinations. **Practice teaching/placement is not included.**

#### PART A – Assessment Purposes

- Please rate the general *purposes* of assessment according to the following scale:  
**Very important (4), Important (3), Less important (2), Not important (1).**

	Very important	Important	Less important	Not important
<b>Purpose of assessment is:</b>				
1. To identify what essential skills students have learned	4	3	2	1
2. To identify students' misunderstanding/misconceptions of subject matter	4	3	2	1
3. To provide feedback to students about their learning	4	3	2	1
4. To measure students' learning progress/improvement over time	4	3	2	1
5. To motivate student learning	4	3	2	1
6. To encourage real-life or practical application of learning	4	3	2	1
7. To develop students' ability to assess themselves	4	3	2	1
8. To develop students' ability to assess their classmates	4	3	2	1
9. To develop students' ability to learn by themselves	4	3	2	1
10. To prepare students for professional life	4	3	2	1
11. To rank students in grades or marks	4	3	2	1

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

12. To decide if students should advance to a higher level	4	3	2	1
13. To ensure students meet the required standards for a qualification	4	3	2	1
14. To monitor teachers teaching performance	4	3	2	1

2. Select the **three** (3) most important purposes from the table above and rank it in order of importance.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

### PART B – Assessment Practices

1. How will you go about assessing your students to achieve the purposes that you rank as important?

---



---



---

2. Please rate the following statements based on your main impressions of your assessment practice in the Bed course/modules that you taught for the last two years (2004/2005). Draw on the totality of your practice when responding to the questions.

	Never	Some-times	Often	Always
<b>Main impressions of my assessment practice for the past two years are:</b>				
1. The assessment was useful/ practical and students learned from it.	1	2	3	4
2. I made clear to students what learning outcomes (e.g. critical thinking etc.) were to be assessed.	1	2	3	4
3. I made clear to students what criteria(marking scheme) were used in assessment	1	2	3	4
4. Students participated in deciding what criteria was to be use in the assessment	1	2	3	4
5. More than one assessment activity (case study, essay etc.) was used	1	2	3	4

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

	Never	Some- times	Often	Always
<b>Main impressions of my assessment practice for the past two years are:</b>				
6. Students were assessed at the start of the modules/courses	1	2	3	4
7. Students were assessed during the modules/courses	1	2	3	4
8. Students were assessed at the end of the modules/courses.	1	2	3	4
9. Students were given advice on drafts/outlines before an assignment was submitted	1	2	3	4
10. Students were given detailed feedback that justified the grade/mark given for their assignments	1	2	3	4
11. Students were given detailed feedback that helped them improve their next assignments	1	2	3	4
12. Students were given detailed feedback that helped them better understand the subject/discipline	1	2	3	4
13. Feedback was followed up by actions to improve student learning (e.g. tutorials etc.)	1	2	3	4
14. Students were given comments on their learning progress throughout the modules/courses	1	2	3	4
15. Double marking was used (moderation)	1	2	3	4
16. Students also graded/ marked each other in the assessment activities (peer assessment)	1	2	3	4
17. Students also graded/ marked themselves in the assessment activities (self assessment)	1	2	3	4

### PART C – Assessment problems/challenges and Causes

- Please list three problems or challenges and their causes, if any, that you have in pursuing “effective” assessment practices:

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

### PART D – Personal Particulars

1. Please circle the appropriate gender.

Male	Female
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>

2. Please circle the appropriate department where you are involved.

Arts, Languages and Human Movement Studies Education	<b>1</b>
Early Childhood Education	<b>2</b>
Science, Mathematics and Technology Education	<b>3</b>
Social Studies Education	<b>4</b>
Other Department	<b>5</b>

**Thank you!**

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

### Appendix C – Student Questionnaire



Tel: (012) 420 5176

Fax: (012) 420 3828

E-mail: carol.gossmann@up.ac.za

**Faculty of Education**

August 2006

#### **Dear Student**

The aim of this survey questionnaire is to determine the perceptions of staff and students concerning the main purpose(s) of assessment as implemented within the BEd Early Childhood Programme.

The questionnaire forms part of the data collection for my personal research in fulfilment of the MEd in Evaluation and Assessment qualification.

Your input will be highly appreciated!

Thank you very much.

Carol Gossmann



## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

### CONSENT FORM

Please sign below if you agree to take part in this questionnaire survey.

I understand that all data will be treated anonymously and only summarised data will be published.

I understand that if I do not give my consent, I will suffer no discrimination or criticism, and my study grades will not be affected in any way.

Signed..... Date.....

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

### Student Questionnaire: Perceptions of assessment experiences/practices

#### Meaning of Assessment

“Assessment” or “assessment activities” refer(s) to formal and informal activities/assignments such as questions, projects, essays, presentations, etc. including written examinations. **Practice teaching/placement is not included.**

#### PART A – Assessment Purposes

- Please rate the **general purposes** of assessment according to the following scale:

**Very important (4), Important (3), Less important (2), Not important (1).**

	Very important	Important	Less important	Not important
<b>Purpose of assessment is:</b>				
1. To identify what essential skills students have learned	4	3	2	1
2. To identify students' misunderstanding/misconceptions of subject matter	4	3	2	1
3. To provide feedback to students about their learning	4	3	2	1
4. To measure students' learning progress/improvement over time	4	3	2	1
5. To motivate student learning	4	3	2	1
6. To encourage real-life or practical application of learning	4	3	2	1
7. To develop students' ability to assess themselves	4	3	2	1
8. To develop students' ability to assess their classmates	4	3	2	1
9. To develop students' ability to learn by themselves	4	3	2	1
10. To prepare students for professional life	4	3	2	1
11. To rank students in grades or marks	4	3	2	1
12. To decide if students should advance to a higher level	4	3	2	1

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13. To ensure students meet the required standards for a qualification	4	3	2	1
14. To monitor lecturer's teaching performance	4	3	2	1

2. Select the **three** (3) most important purposes from the table above and rank it in order of importance.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

### PART B – Assessment Experience

1. Please rate the following statements based on your *main impressions* of your assessment experience(s) for the last two years (2004/2005). Draw on the **totality** of that experience when responding to the questions.

	Never	Some-times	Often	Always
<b>Main impressions of my assessment experience for the past two years are:</b>				
1. The assessment was useful/ practical and I learned from it.	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
2. I knew what learning outcomes (e.g. critical thinking, research skills etc.) were to be assessed.	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
3. I knew what criteria (e.g. the marking scheme) were used in assessment	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
4. I participated in deciding what criteria was to be use in the assessment	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
5. More than one assessment activity (case study, essay etc.) was used	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
6. I was assessed at the start of the modules/courses	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
7. I was assessed during the modules/courses	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

	Never	Some- times	Often	Always
<b>Main impressions of my assessment experience for the past two years are:</b>				
8. I was assessed at the end of the modules/courses.	1	2	3	4
9. I was given advice on drafts/outlines before an assignment was submitted	1	2	3	4
10. I was given detailed feedback that justified the grade/mark given for their assignments	1	2	3	4
11. I was given detailed feedback that helped them improve their next assignments	1	2	3	4
12. I was given detailed feedback that helped them better understand the subject/discipline	1	2	3	4
13. Feedback/comments were followed up by actions to improve my learning (e.g. tutorials etc.)	1	2	3	4
14. I was given comments on my learning progress throughout the modules/courses	1	2	3	4
15. Double marking was used (moderation)	1	2	3	4
16. I also graded or assessed my classmates in the assessment activities (peer assessment)	1	2	3	4
17. I also graded or assessed myself in the assessment activities (self assessment)	1	2	3	4

### PART C – Assessment problems or challenges and their causes

- Please list three *problems or challenges* and their *causes*, if any, that you have experienced concerning the assessment activities:

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

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### PART D – Personal Particulars

1. Please indicate your gender.

### PART D – Personal Particulars

1. Please circle the appropriate gender.

Male	Female
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>

2. Please circle the appropriate department where you are involved.

Arts, Languages and Human Movement Studies Education	<b>1</b>
Early Childhood Education	<b>2</b>
Science, Mathematics and Technology Education	<b>3</b>
Social Studies Education	<b>4</b>
Other Department	<b>5</b>

**Thank you for your time and effort!**

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### Appendix D – Codes given to analysed qualitative data

#### Codes given for challenges to effective assessment

Students' Coding	Staff Coding
1. Same deadlines for different modules/heavy workloads/lack of time	1. Large class size/insufficient resources/lack of time, influence type of assessment/feedback
2. Too exam orientated, too much memorization, lack of practice, no continuous assessment/overuse of MCQ's	2. Negative student attitudes (e.g not interested in formal feedback, just want marks etc.)
3. Reliability of marking and grading (ineffective group work, unfair peer assessment, unclear assessment aims or criteria)	3. Institutional constraints (e.g. having to grade in a bell curve, too dependent on test and exams, little support)
4. Assessor reliability (lack of moderation, prejudice, difference in standards, personal preference, inconsistency, norm reference)	4. High level assessment takes longer to mark, to give more research base assessment, to keep balance between content and research
5. Inconsistency between modules (e.g. level of difficulty/challenges, management of assessment)	5. Lack of skills from students (e.g. formulation skills to deal with criticism, critical thinking, reflection, independent studying, higher order thinking,
6. Relevancy of assessment	6. Lack of skills from lecturers (e.g. to do peer and self assessment, cling to known./old practices, poor management
7. Feedback/follow-up	7. Module structure (e.g. lack of time for self peer assessment and authentic assessment, content to cover)
8. Language issues (e.g. translation of exam papers)	8. Language issues ( English speaking students are hyper critical towards other students, poor language use, basic subject language
	9. Lack of clear criteria and guidelines
	10. Workload (e.g. to many assignments and portfolios
	11. Part time lecturers (e.g. influence continuous assessment)
	12. No alignment between staff (e.g. concerning standards, mode and timing)

**Appendix - E Faculty of Education Assessment Policy**

Section B: Submission to Senate
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UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

**Faculty of Education**

**Assessment Policy, Principles and Practices**

*10 October 2007*

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

### *Table of Contents*

1. Introduction
2. Rationale
3. Policy Statement
4. Faculty Practices
  - 4.1 Matching assessment to programme and course outcomes
  - 4.2 Intellectual quality
  - 4.3 Relevance/authenticity
  - 4.4 Transparency of assessment requirements
  - 4.5 Assessment workload
  - 4.6 Conduct of assessment
  - 4.7 Single assessment opportunity
  - 4.8 Marking and grading
  - 4.9 Return of assessment products and provision of feedback
  
  - 4.10 Quality assurance of assessment practices
  - 4.11 Teaching practice
5. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)
6. Other important Assessment documents



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### 1. INTRODUCTION

*The critical role of assessment in the life of any organisation, the Faculty and of the University.*

Assessment is not an end in itself but a vehicle for educational improvement. In general, assessment in education and training is about collecting evidence of students' work so that judgements about students' achievements, or non-achievements, can be made and decisions arrived at. The decisions may have to do with the student or with the learning programme.

The most important use of assessment though is to judge the performance of students so that credible qualifications may be awarded (SAQA: Criteria and Guidelines for Assessment).

### 2. RATIONALE

Assessment can be a potent stimulus and guide to learning. To achieve this, it must be a *systematic* process that provides directions to what should be learned, and provides evidence of how well that learning has been achieved. The principles and practices outlined in this document provide a framework for such systematic approach to assessment.

### 3. POLICY STATEMENT

Assessment practices are integral to teaching and learning at the University of Pretoria. Assessment at the University and subsequently the Faculty should be based on the internationally accepted **principles** and practices. These include the following:

- Learning programmes and modules should have clear outcomes with consistent assessment criteria.
- Assessment should be integrated into the learning programme and module design process, and be matched to learning outcomes. Coherence must be maintained between outcomes, learning activities, and the methods of and criteria for assessment.

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

- Integrated assessment enables students to demonstrate that they are able to integrate knowledge, skills and attitudes that match the purpose of the qualification.
- Sound programme design, facilitation and assessment should form the basis of and support student learning and student progression. This is particularly true in the early stages of programmes.
- Assessment should promote desirable educational results.
- Students' competence should be judged on the basis of quality evidence.
- Credible assessment is valid, reliable, consistent and fair. Credibility is maintained through moderation. The use of various assessment methods assists in reflecting an authentic environment.
- Assessment should be transparent with expectations and assessment criteria being clearly communicated in advance.
- Students should have access to feedback on assessment. This feedback must be timely, so as to promote learning and facilitate improvement.
- Assessment must be managed efficiently. Efficiency relates to the practicality and feasibility of assessment; the volume or magnitude and timing of assessment; student and staff workloads; available resources; security arrangements; and the time provided for student reflection.
- Evaluation of assessment practices should take place at appropriate academic levels (faculty, school, programme and module). The results should be monitored and evaluated.
- Competent assessors must be used to assess students.

## 4. Faculty Practices

The following administrative guidelines are designed to ensure that assessment practices within the Faculty comply with the principles outlined above.

### 4.1 Matching the assessment programme with course outcomes

The assessment programme for each course/module should be designed to be consistent with the outcomes of the course/module. The links between each assessment task and the course/module outcomes should be made explicit. The assessment techniques and strategies must be appropriate to the type and level of learning described in the course/module outcomes.

To achieve this **assessment plan** is suggested. Such assessment plan has to be aligned very carefully with the instructional or teaching strategies designed to achieve the expected learning outcomes.

### 4.2 Intellectual quality

The intellectual effort required to complete assessment tasks should accurately reflect the outcomes of the course and the expectations of university students that are embodied in the **level descriptors** of the National Qualifications Framework. This will generally mean that assessment tasks should stimulate higher order thinking and challenge students to apply their knowledge, analyse unfamiliar information, and evaluate alternatives.

### 4.3 Relevance/authenticity

In order that assessment helps make learning relevant, assessment opportunities should require students to:

- refer to and build on their prior understandings;
- integrate their understandings across course/module boundaries and,

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

- apply their understandings to challenging issues and authentic problems.

### 4.4 Transparency of assessment requirements

Study Guides including details of the assessment programme for courses/modules are to be published and given to students no later than the end of the first week of the semester in which the course/module commences. This information must include the due dates for all assessment tasks and a statement about late submission of assignments. A fair deadline for submission must also be indicated as well as the expected turn-around time for feedback.

When there is provision for students to negotiate aspects of an assessment task (for example, when students can select their own topic for an investigation), the Study Guide must describe the procedures for this negotiation.

### 4.5 Assessment workload

The total assessment workload in a course/module should be consistent with the credits students can earn by successful completion of the course/module. Assessment workload should not be considered simply as the quantity of work that students must produce. It should also take account of the intellectual effort required to produce the assessment product.

As far as is reasonable, the assessment schedule for each course/module should be designed to spread the workload over the duration of the course/module.

If possible **integrated assessment** within module, over module and/or programme should be considered (refer to Department of Education integrated assessment policy document).

### 4.6 Conducting assessment

Assessment tasks should be conducted in a manner that may reasonably be expected to provide students with an optimum opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

the course/module outcomes. This includes a fair notification period prior to submission i.e. overnight tasks cannot be used as a gradable product.

### 4.7 Single assessment opportunity

Other than in very exceptional circumstances approved by the Head of Department, students' assessment in a course/module should not be based on a single assessment event because in such cases it is difficult to ensure fairness, validity and reliability. This ruling applies specifically to the principle of continuous assessment.

When it is determined that a single assessment opportunity is the most appropriate form of assessment in a course/module:

- the assessment must be in line with the outcomes of the course/module.
- students must receive reasonable feedback on their progress before the single item assessment.
- where possible, the assessment product should be evaluated by more than one assessor.

### 4.8 Marking and grading

Each assessment task that contributes to a final result in a course/module must be assessed according to **clear criteria** that are given to students at the time they receive information about the assessment task. These published criteria should describe explicitly how the lecturer would distinguish between different levels of achievement, with particular emphasis on what will be considered high quality student performance. This description may be in terms of knowledge and understanding, skills or attitudes and values (using either *criterion-referencing* or *standards-referencing*). Results awarded for each assessment task may be expressed as a mark, a grade or a position on a standards-referenced scale.

### 4.9 Return of assessment products and provision of feedback

Students should receive specific, constructive feedback on all assessment tasks other than final examinations. It is not sound practice to only award a mark.

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

### 4.10 Quality assurance of assessment practices

Quality assurance procedures within the Faculty include two forms of course moderation: internal and external.

An external examiner is an expert in the field of specialisation who serves as a critical friend in the evaluation of examination papers and in the moderation of marked examination scripts. The main functions of the external examiner are to determine whether the examination paper is *fair* (taking into account the required standards of the programme), whether the marking is *reliable* and whether the assessment and grading decisions are *valid*.

All staff members responsible for the teaching of a single module or course will manage internal moderation. This moderation should ensure that all staff members reach consensus regarding the alignment of outcomes and assessment tasks, and regarding the assessment criteria and standards to be applied.

### 4.11 Teaching practice

To achieve the requirements of certain courses/ modules, students will be required to complete practical work where they are placed within schools and/or nursery schools. The Faculty will determine the times and locations of these placements. Students must have completed the necessary pre-requisite modules or parts of modules for the placements prior to commencing the next placement in the sequence.

A student may be withdrawn from a placement by the Dean if the candidate:

- Has committed an illegal act.
- Has breached the professional conduct expectations of the supervising institution.
- Has been consistently unable, after due instruction and guidance, to perform the teaching placement tasks required at an appropriate standard.

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

If a student fails to attend all required commitments during a practice teaching period, a written explanation must be provided to the Head of Department. The missed time must be made up at a time suitable to the school and the Faculty of Education.

### **5. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)**

#### **5.1 Preface**

This policy has to be read in conjunction with the UP policies on Recognition of Prior learning (References below)

To certify the knowledge, skills and competences of a candidate in terms of the exit requirements of a given qualification which vests within the structures of the Faculty and to award the candidate such qualification which the Faculty sees fit to bestow upon a candidate in terms of the work-related experiences of the candidate and/or informal training procured. However, such procedure would be more of an exception than a rule. For examples, a candidate whom has worked in the education and training sector for ten years, achieved excellence and recognition in terms of the knowledge, skills and competences required to perform the related tasks or functions within this sector, could be awarded a Post Graduate Certificate in Higher Education by the Faculty on successful RPL. The full cost implication would apply. The Faculty of Education could also grant partial recognition to a candidate and require that where the minimum criteria had not been met, such candidate would have to complete a module or number of modules in adjacent to the recognised prior learning record of experiences. In such case the Faculty of Education would award a degree or diploma to a candidate after the suggested requirements had been met.

The Faculty of Education could admit candidates into formal university programmes in such cases where the candidates lack the formal entry requirements based on required qualifications. The successful RPL assessment would therefore have to certify that a candidate meets the knowledge, skills and competences put forward by the qualification required for entry. For example one entry requirement into a Masters programme would normally be the possession of an honours qualification. Candidates

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

could be admitted into a Masters programme on an accumulative record of a variety of qualifications and a very strong work or institutional record.

For the purpose of this policy, the Faculty of Education therefore distinguishes very clearly between a policy based upon recognising a candidate's prior learning experiences for certification and admission purposes, and a policy based on accrediting and recognising other or adjacent qualifications for registration and admission purposes.

Furthermore, the Faculty of Education also wishes to recognise the exceptional achievements of senior educators and trainers in the field and is therefore committed to accommodate prospective students who have worked profoundly in curriculum development, teaching and learning, management and educational psychology in South Africa for many years. Therefore, the Faculty of Education bases its RPL policy on the assumption that many educators and trainers who occupy senior positions in Education and Training have achieved such status because of their intervention and participation in their allocated fields of specialisation over many years. The faculty argues that it would be of little value requesting such candidates to follow through the normal academic route in pursue of a further qualification in education and training.

### **5.2 Defining recognition of prior learning**

The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) implies that the Faculty of Education recognises the work done by prospective students is the field of education or to a field of interest adjacent to education, for the sole purpose of admitting students into programmes for which they have no formal recognised and required qualification. This implies that the Faculty of Education therefore accepts and understands that any successful prior learning recognition, based on the evaluation of any informal qualification(s) or formal qualifications, work or task-related experiences, or institutional or cooperative training, would be regarded as to be at par or equivalent to the conditions or requirements set by the Faculty of Education in fulfilling the requirements of a qualification or being admitted onto a qualification. Such



## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

assessment criteria and standards would be based on the performances and tasks set forward for educators and trainers in the Norms and Standards for Educators, the appropriate levels defined by the NQF for a qualification and the content and outcomes prescribed for the different modules and programmes. However, such criteria should serve a very broad and global purpose in assessing the prior learning experiences of candidates and should not lapse into the trivial recall or fragmented bits of knowledge and skills.

### **5.3 Composition of the RPL Committee of the Faculty of Education (RPLCF)**

The RPL Committee of Faculty will consist of the following members:

- The Dean (ex officio)
- The School Chair residing
- The programme manager in whose interest the application lies and who also serves as subject specialist.
- The appropriate Head of Department or her/his representative
- The Head of Student Administration or her/his representative
- One senior external subject specialist acquainted with the field of specialisation to which the RPL application applies.

### **5.4 Categories of Recognition of Prior Learning**

- Recognising prior learning experiences in terms of modular requirements
- Recognising prior learning experiences in terms of whole qualifications

### **5.5 Procedures for applying for the RPL in terms modules, clusters of modules or whole qualifications**

5.5.1 No student will be admitted unto a programme while the outcomes of the RPL applications are pending or whilst the Executive of Senate responsible for the assessment of the applications has not come to a decision.

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

- 5.5.2 Each programme manager will compile a set of criteria to be used by the RPLCF when the portfolio of a candidate or applicant has to be reviewed. Such criteria would have to consider the outcomes of the programme or degree recognition of prior learning is sought. This implies that a set of criteria will have to be developed against which applicants' prior learning experiences could be assessed. Also see point 7 below.
- 5.5.3 Applications for the recognition of prior learning have to be submitted to the RPL committee of the Faculty of Education in the first semester of the year preceding registration with the University of Pretoria. This will allow for the processing of the applications and for the submission of the applications to the last Faculty Board Meeting (FBM) of the preceding year. The outcomes of the FBM have to be submitted to the Executive of Senate dealing with the application at the last Senate Meeting of the year preceding registration, with the exception of those cases where the Faculty of Education has the mandate<sup>1</sup> to decide on the admission of applicants unto programme in the year of registration.
- 5.5.4 The programme manager (PM) and head of department (HOD) will prescribe the evidence required to be reviewed by the RPLCF. This could include the following: portfolios, letters of recommendation, diploma and degree certificates, reflections, commendations, testimonials, transcripts of academic records, publications, and any other evidence candidate would wish to table at the RPLCF meeting. These documents will not be submitted as evidence to the Faculty Board or Executive of Senate but will be retained and secured by the RPLCF should further evidence would be required by FB or Senate.
- 5.5.5 Due to the extensive nature of portfolios and teaching journals, such documentation would have to be reviewed by committee members at least two months prior to the scheduled interview with the candidate.

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<sup>1</sup> This would apply for example to undergraduate students not meeting the entry requirements of the Faculty of Education and where admission has to be granted based on special admission examinations and provisional university entrance. Such procedure however would not vest within the tasks and functions of the RPLCF.

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

- 5.5.6 The PM and HOD could also expect a candidate to be fully prepared in terms of the content of a reading list compiled to be defended at the RPL interview. The candidate will be assessed on her/his understanding and interpretation of the information contained in the recommended readings.
- 5.5.7 The RPLCF will interview the candidate on the criteria set by the PM and HOD in terms of the outcomes expected to be achieved by the candidate in terms of the expected qualification. For example, if a candidate wishes to be exempted from the BEd (Hons) qualifications, then the interview will be based on the candidate's knowledge and understanding of the outcomes expected to be achieved at NQF level 7.
- 5.5.8 The Head of Department, in liaison with the PM, will compile a report (recommendation) based on the outcomes of the RPLCF and table the report at the first FBM or as soon as time allows. Such report will contain the following information:
- 1.1 The applicant's formal application.
  - 1.2 Copies of academic qualifications.
  - 1.3 Transcripts of the candidate's academic record(s).
  - 1.4 Recommendations by the HOD, PM and external subject specialist as well as a global percentage mark or score reflecting the candidate's command of the field of specialisation.
  - 1.5 Copies of testimonials, additional recommendations or supplementary evidence.
- 5.5.9 The School Chair designate and the Dean of the Faculty of Education will defend the decision of the RPLCF and FBM at the executive meeting of Senate convened for such purpose.
- 5.5.9 The decision of the RPLCF and executive of Senate dealing with RPL matters will be final.
- 5.5.10 It still remains the prerogative of programme managers to recommend the completion of any module that might supplement the prior learning experiences of a candidate should this be required.
- 5.5.11 Faculty administration will be informed on the outcomes of the decision of Senate and inform the candidate accordingly.

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

### 5.6 ADMINISTRATIVE AND ORGANISATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

The head of Student Administration, Faculty of Education will put into place the necessary mechanisms to administer and manage the RPL applications. Such office will serve all administrative, managerial and organisational issues related to the RPL applications.

### 5.7 FEES PAYABLE FOR THE PROCESSING OF THE RPL

Student Administration, in liaison with the Finance Department will determine a reasonable fee for the assessment of a candidate in terms of the RPL procedures and charge applicants accordingly.

## 6. Other important documents

### 6.1 UP Governing documents/Applicable documents

<http://www.up.ac.za/intranet/registrar/index.html>

- **Yearbook information and applicable regulations**  
(<http://www.up.ac.za/up/web/en/student/undergraduate/prospective/yearbooks.html>)
- **Examinations and Related Matters**  
(<http://www.up.ac.za/intranet/registrar/reg0025e.html>)

Also pay attention to the utilisation of **objective evaluation** (Multiple choice questions)  
– **Appendix 5** within the above document

- **Recognition of Prior Learning at UP**

Policy on Assessment and Accreditation of Prior Learning

[http://www.up.ac.za/intranet/registrar/RPL\\_Policy\\_on\\_assessment.pdf](http://www.up.ac.za/intranet/registrar/RPL_Policy_on_assessment.pdf)

Institutional policy on Postgraduate Student cases and recognition of prior learning

[http://www.up.ac.za/intranet/registrar/Recognition\\_prior\\_learning\\_newpolicy\(e\).doc](http://www.up.ac.za/intranet/registrar/Recognition_prior_learning_newpolicy(e).doc)

### 6.2 Other related materials/Reference documents

- **Guidelines for Teaching and Learning** – S 6144/06(amended)  
(<http://www.up.ac.za/telematic/research/principle.htm>)

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

- **UP Assessment Framework**  
(<http://www.up.ac.za/telematic/research/assessment/index.htm>)

### 6.3 Associated documents

Assessment Training programme materials of the Department for Education Innovation. Compiled by the Education Innovation Committee of the Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria.

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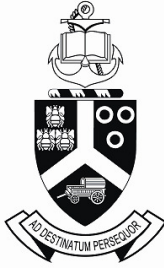
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SAQA: Criteria and Guidelines for Assessment of NQF Registered Unit standards and Qualification

## Appendix F University of Pretoria Assessment Policy



Universiteit van Pretoria  
University of Pretoria

Office of the Registrar

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### Institutional Policy on Assessment

Policy Group/Category: Teaching & Learning

Doc number: xx

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#### 1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide a vision for assessment and to align the strategic plan, institutional policy, regulations and guidelines on the assessment of student learning.

Other objectives of the policy are to:

- define the principles on which UP bases its assessment practices;
- serve as a resource to provide information on current policy related to the assessment of student learning;
- inform and guide assessment practices at UP;
- provide a framework according to which Faculty assessment policy and practices can be organised and interpreted;
- create an institutional awareness regarding UP's responsibility and accountability towards assessment of student learning.

#### 2. Organisational scope

This is a university wide policy. Faculties have the responsibility to ensure alignment of Faculty policies and practices, as well as regulations contained in the Faculty yearbooks with this policy.

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

### 3. Policy statement

*Assessment practices are integral to teaching and learning at the University of Pretoria. Assessment should be based on internationally accepted principles and practices. These include the following:*

Learning programmes and modules should have clear outcomes with consistent assessment criteria.

Assessment should be integrated into the learning programme and module design process, and be matched to learning outcomes. Coherence must be maintained between outcomes, learning activities, and the methods of and criteria for assessment.

Integrated assessment enables learners to demonstrate that they are able to integrate knowledge, skills and attitudes that match the purpose of the qualification.

Sound programme design, facilitation and assessment should form the basis of and support student learning and student progression. This is particularly true in the early stages of programmes.

Assessment should promote desirable educational results.

Students' competence should be judged on the basis of quality evidence.

Credible assessment is valid, reliable, consistent and fair. Credibility is maintained through moderation. The use of various assessment methods assists in reflecting an authentic environment.

Assessment should be transparent with expectations and assessment criteria being clearly communicated in advance.

Students should have access to feedback on assessment. This feedback must be timely, so as to promote learning and facilitate improvement.

Assessment must be managed efficiently. Efficiency relates to the practicality and feasibility of assessment; the volume or magnitude and timing of assessment; student and staff workloads; available resources; security arrangements; and the time provided for student reflection.

Evaluation of assessment practices should take place at appropriate academic levels (faculty, school, programme and module). The results should be monitored and evaluated.

Competent assessors must be used to assess students.

## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

### 4. Definitions/Abbreviations

**Assessor:** A person who is qualified to assess learners' performance in relation to preset outcomes, assessment criteria, standards and qualifications. In the UP context the assessor is the lecturer or examiner.

### 5. Documents

#### 5.1 Governing documents/Applicable documents

- Statute of the University of Pretoria
- Yearbook information and applicable regulations (<http://www.up.ac.za/up/web/en/student/undergraduate/prospective/yearbooks.html>)
- Examinations and Related Matters (<http://www.up.ac.za/intranet/registrar/reg0025e.html>)

#### 5.2 Other related materials/Reference documents

- Guidelines for Teaching and Learning – S 6144/06(amended) (<http://www.up.ac.za/telematic/research/principle.htm>)
- UP Assessment Framework (<http://www.up.ac.za/telematic/research/assessment/index.htm>)

#### 5.3 Associated documents

- Faculty-specific and Departmental assessment policies and procedures.
- Assessment Training programme materials of the Department for Education Innovation.

### 6. Appendices

None

### 7. Responsibility for implementation

The Registrar will be responsible for University wide implementation of this policy through appropriate delegation of responsibility to Faculties and Support Services.



## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

### 8. Review schedule/Policy life cycle

The policy owner shall consider the policy for review three years after approval, or earlier if required.

### 9. Replacement

Not applicable

### 10. Contact information:

Title / First Name / Surname	Prof J A Boon
Position	Director
Department	Education Innovation
Tel no	420-4145

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### 11. Document history table:

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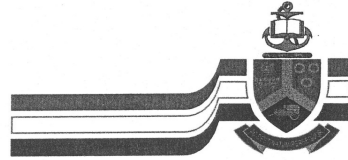
See “Policy Development Guidelines” or contact the Policy Administrator for further information on this policy.  
 Policy Administrator, Policy Office, Office of the Registrar. Policy website up.pol...

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## University of Pretoria – Gossmann, C (2008)

### Appendix G – Letter of Consent



University of Pretoria

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FACULTY OF EDUCATION

12 July 2006

#### TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to confirm that Carol Gossmann (Student Number: ) having satisfactorily completed all the pre-requirements for beginning her research work in the Master's degree programme of the Faculty of Education is granted permission to solicit and use respondents from the Faculty of Education as subjects for her study. As from the end of July 2006, Mrs. Gossmann will be undertaking fieldwork in the Faculty, to seek deeper insights into her research topic on staff and students' perceptions and experiences of assessment practices in the B.Ed Programme.

In granting the permission, I am satisfied that she has both the integrity and sensitivity to pursue her investigation in a manner that will respect the rights of staff and students she will be working with.

Gilbert O.M. Onwu  
Ag. Dean  
Faculty of Education  
University of Pretoria